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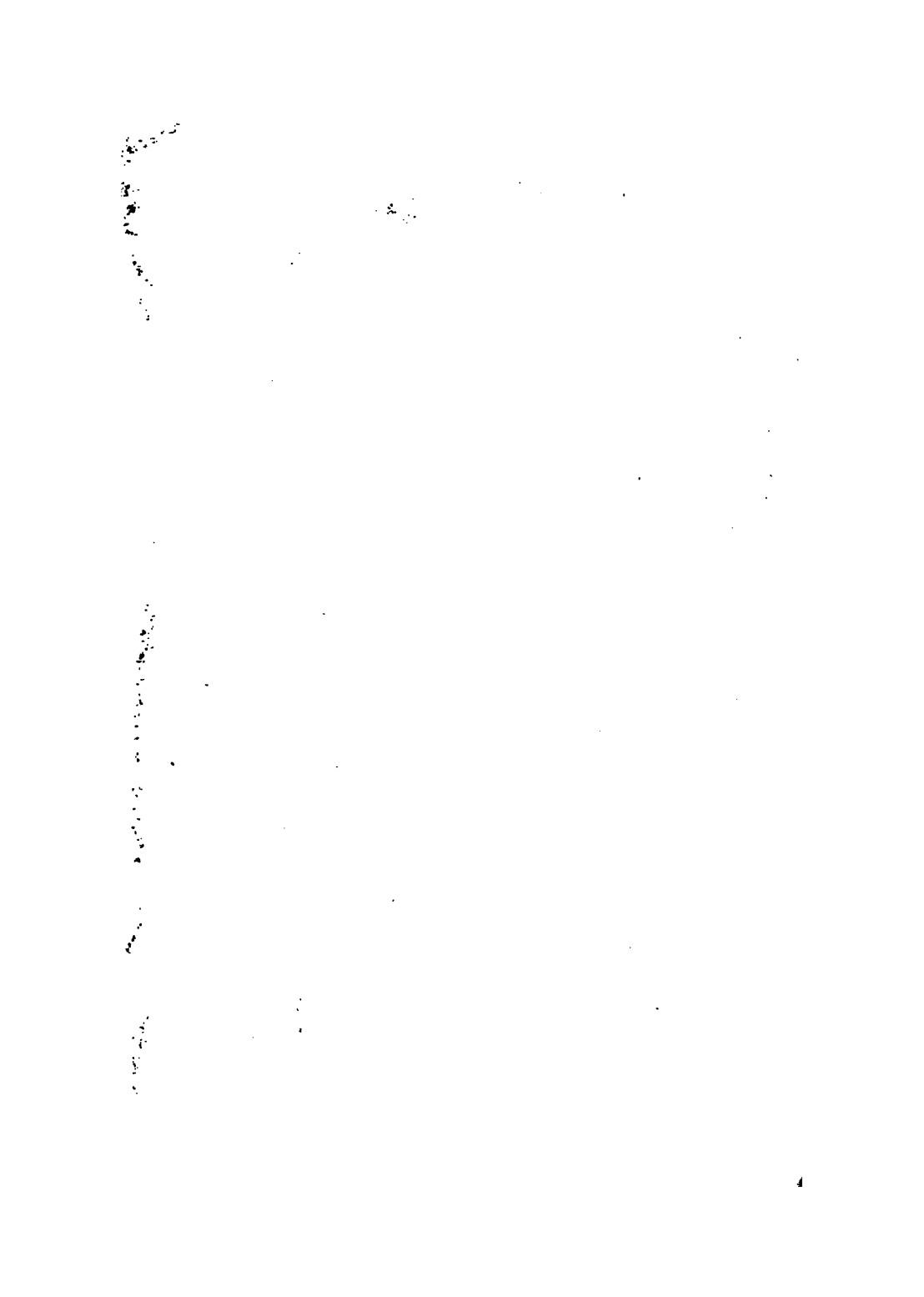


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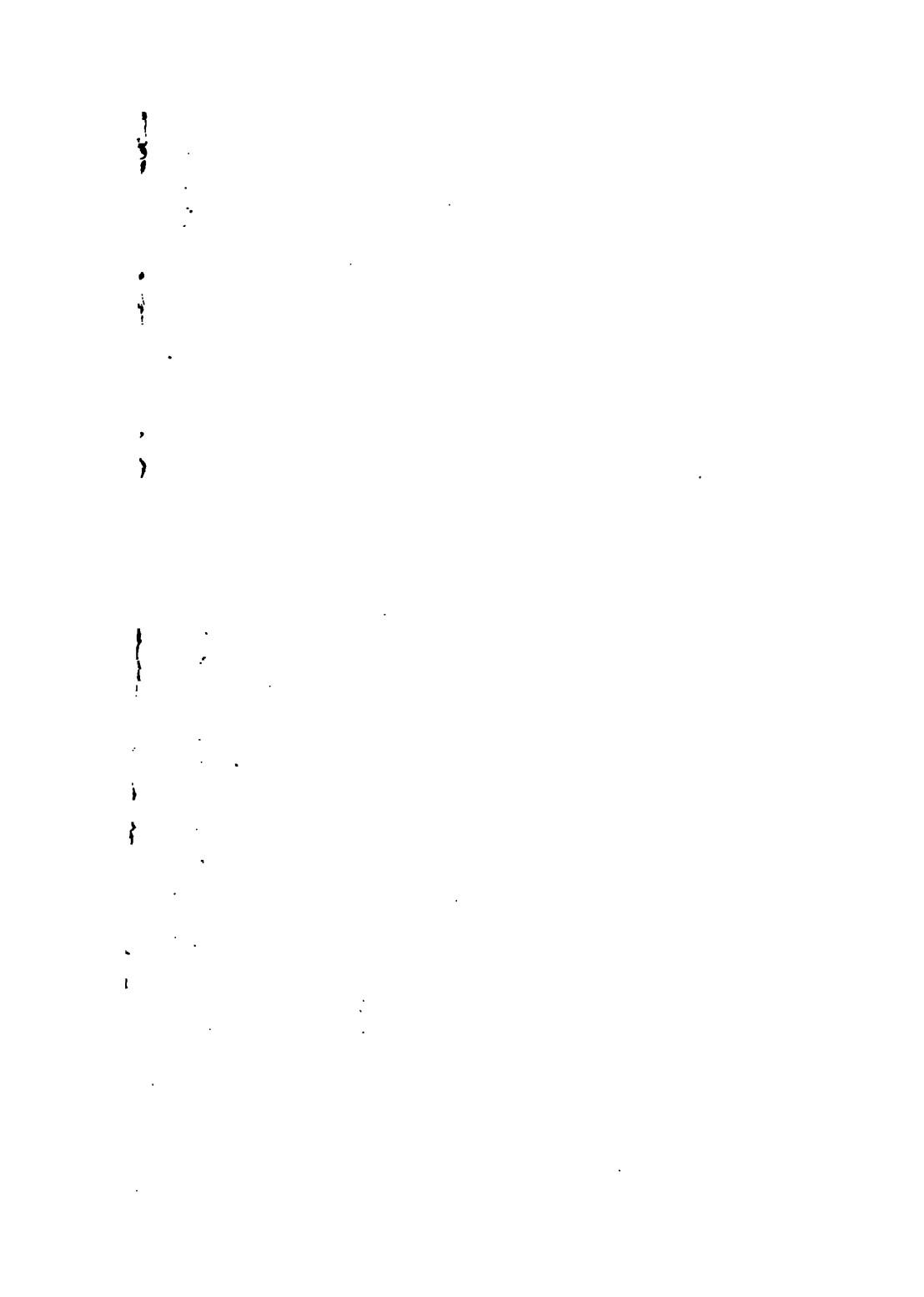
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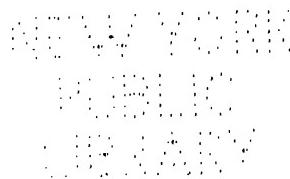
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# The Imprisoned Splendor



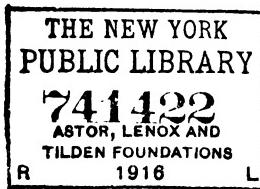
BY  
ANGELA MORGAN

AUTHOR OF  
“THE HOUR HAS STRUCK  
AND OTHER POEMS”



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Thanks are due to the editors of *The Metropolitan Magazine*, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, *Ainslee's Magazine*, *Smart Set*, *The Pictorial Review* and *Hearst's Magazine*, for permission to use these stories.

**TO MY MOTHER**



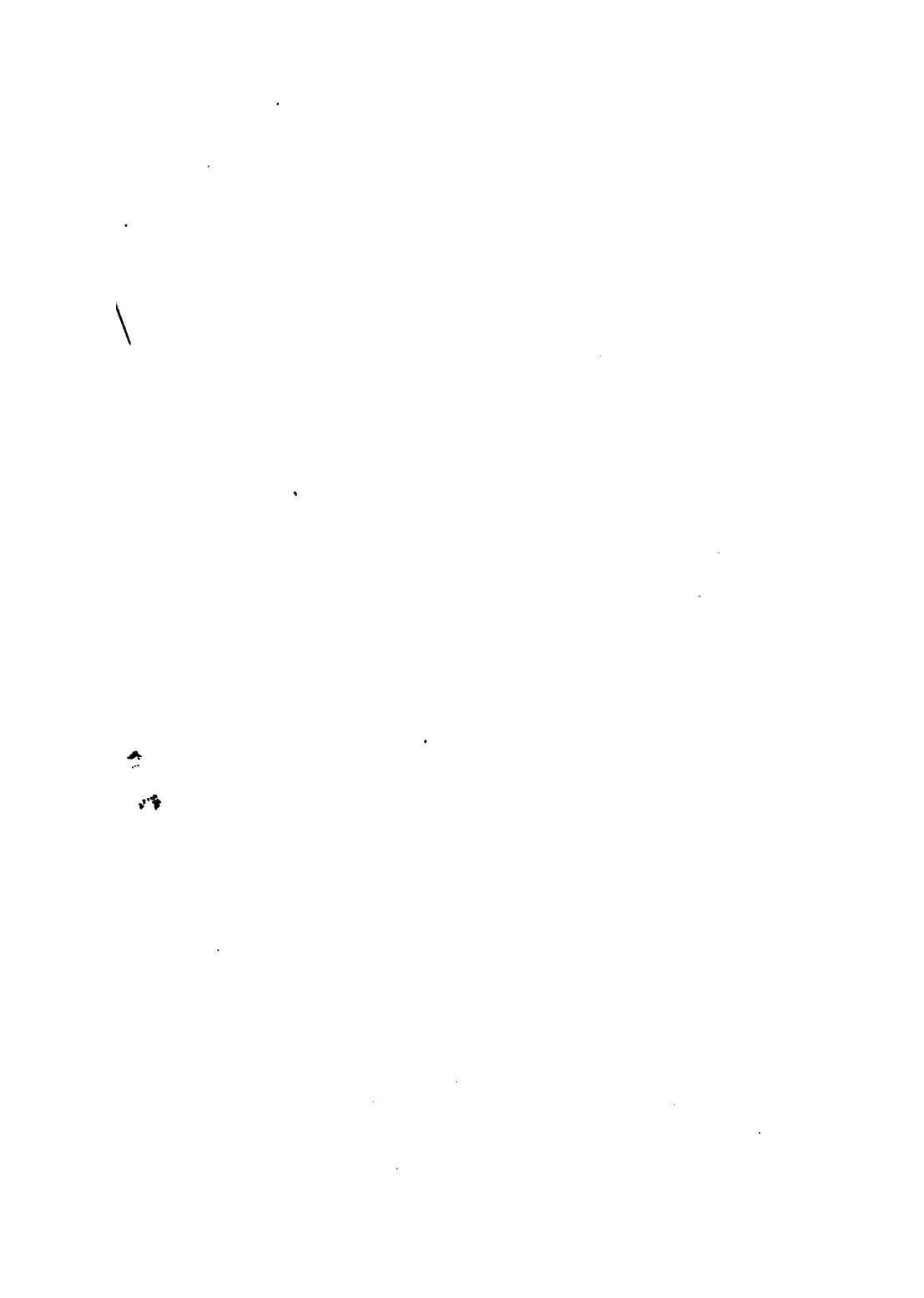
MARY WILM  
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**"Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise  
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.  
There is an inmost centre in us all,  
Where truth abides in fulness; and around  
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,  
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.  
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh  
Blinds it, and makes all error: and 'to know'  
Rather consists in opening out a way  
Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape,  
Than in effecting entry for a light  
Supposed to be without."** —BROWNING.



## THE IMPRISONED SPLENDOR

**S**HE had promised. And to-day was Thursday. And it was now four o'clock. Realization struck to the roots of being, leaving her faint. In the jammed elevator that descended with startling swiftness, she felt an instant's need of the supporting human wall.

In a business office upstairs she had just braved the blow of an incredible disappointment, the third she had received that day. And now a single letter offered the only remaining chance. Torn with anxiety, she had already telephoned twice to her boarding place to ask if the letter had arrived. She must telephone again.

But there was a rush on, and every booth was busy. She paced back and forth—tense, distraught, wondering if in all that mass of driven human beings, any was so driven as she. Everything depended upon the outcome; all the high hopes she had builded, her chance to pursue the work she had begun, her very right to breathe in this teeming city of toilers. The operator darted curious glances at the strained, impatient face with its burning eyes that sent repeated stabs of inquiry.

"Ain't she the limit for nerves?" she whispered to her companion. "She's on the verge—and that's no jolly." Then briskly: "No, miss, not yet. Haven't answered. Wait a minute. Four-eight-four-three Morning? Here they are—Number Six."

Margaret Lapham pushed breathlessly into the booth.

"Yes, hello! Is this Mrs. Elgers? I'm bothering you again; please forgive me, but will you look once more and see if that letter . . . Yes? . . . Thank you so much . . . I'll hold the wire." She covered her eyes with her hot fingers. "Yes? . . . What's that? . . . There is a letter? You are sure? Oh, won't you look, please, and see if it's from the Carey firm? . . . No, I shan't mind . . . Yes? . . . It is? . . . It is from them? Oh, thank you, thank you . . . Yes, I'm coming right away."

She sped along the street, afire with hope. Her buoyant faith, trained to expect the best, could consider one outcome only.

At last the deadlock would be broken, the unaccountable cycle of failure that had kept her in such stress of uncertainty, forcing her to this accumulation of debts and goading her at times to doubt the wisdom of a daring that would stake all on a single-handed venture. She would be free!

And yet when she reached the door of her

boarding-place uptown, something within her quailed. After all, suppose the letter should not be favorable? And this was her last day of grace. To each who had a claim to press she had said: "Thursday I will surely have the money for you—Thursday at the very latest." So many things had failed her utterly in the past weeks. Suppose even now—for a dizzy moment she hung over that precipice. Then the habit of her mind asserted itself. It was bound to be right. Always, in her extremity, relief had come. Rallying all her forces, she turned the key in the latch.

"Oh, Miss Lapham!" It was the voice of her landlady at the head of the stairs.

A hot chill seized her. "Yes, Mrs. Elgers?"

"The letter's on the dining-room mantel. I put it there for you myself."

The girl knew that the woman had paused in the upper hall and was waiting there to know the result. She felt the force of her anxiety—anxiety as great, certainly, as her own. As she reached for the letter it swept over her how desperate it was, after all, that any human being's fate should hang by so slight a thread. She tore the envelope jaggedly across and pulled out the folded sheet. Her face, alight with eagerness, went suddenly blank.

"Were you coming up, Miss Lapham, or——"

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"Oh, yes, I'm coming up." Her absurdly cheerful tone rang pitifully false.

At the landing she lifted her face. Its ghastly courage told the story.

Mrs. Elgers fell back. "Oh, Miss Lapham, it isn't bad luck again?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Elgers, but—the check hasn't come."

"But I've got to have it. I can't be put off any longer."

"Just a minute, Mrs. Elgers. Maybe in the late mail—"

The other interrupted her. "The same old story. I can't depend on faith and hopes. I know you did succeed at first. That's why I thought I could trust you. It's hardly the custom, at least in New York, to take such risks without some security."

Margaret Lapham lifted her head. "I may have been too hopeful, but I did not deliberately impose upon you. If I had dreamed for a moment—"

"That's neither here nor there. The point is, what are you going to do? Only this morning I had an applicant for your room—"

The girl turned and stood very erect. "I understand, Mrs. Elgers. If I don't give you the money to-night the room is yours in the morning."

"You can't blame me, Miss Lapham. It's

because I'm hounded just as you are. The awful cost of living——”

“I don't blame you; you couldn't do more.”

There were two more flights to her room. Dazedly she began the ascent. The gilt and crimson figures in the wall paper started a crazy dance; the banister seemed to slide from her grasp.

She sank into a chair, unable yet to credit what had taken place. She was put out—put out of the house—because she could not pay. Then it had all been wrong—her faith, her determination to fight her battle along the lines of the higher call. The repeated disappointments that she had firmly believed to be but tunnels leading out into a full success had, after all, been warnings of the inevitable crash.

“Miss Lapham!” William, the man-of-all-work, was calling from below. “There's a man down here says he's orders to take your typewriter.”

“Tell him to come up.”

In a moment he hustled in. She stood at the window with her back to him, sweltering with the disgrace of it. “There it is,” she said over her shoulder. “Yes—the table goes with it. The cover?—Don't you find it?—right there in the corner.”

Determined not to look at him she stared straight ahead, her lips rigid, her throat throb-

bing. "What was my crime?" she cried within herself. "Just that I staked all on the Dream. I believed in the vision. I thought—I thought the gods were on the side of faith and daring!"

Hers was a transom window, and it opened on a tennis court, where now in the late afternoon men and women were blithely enjoying the game. She watched them, her brain seething. Never in her life had she felt free to indulge in recreations such as this. Necessity had driven her always, as far back as she could think, to bend her every energy to a livelihood.

No, she had never idled; she had not wished to idle. All she had asked was to do her own work—the work she loved with a passion that could not be quenched. Yet she had come to this—robbed of her working instruments, stripped of her very means of living.

"Miss Lapham!"

"Yes, William."

"There's another man down here, says he won't go till he——"

"I know, I'm coming down."

"And there's a lady too——"

"Yes, I understand."

If she could only be callous to these blows! Surely, it seemed as if repeated trials should have hardened her. But as she went down now to face her creditors, she knew her sensitiveness was a thing that could not be benumbed.

It was half-past six before the final caller left, and the sound of the dinner bell reminded her that she had eaten nothing since morning. She was indeed both faint and hungry; but dinner in Mrs. Elger's dining-room was out of the question. Already, she had a shrinking certainty that every person in the house knew all the facts of her disgrace. On the way upstairs again, her heart quaked at each landing, for fear she might encounter interested and perhaps well-meaning boarders. Their pity she would not have!

Even her room was not her own—she had no longer any right to stay in it. Realization was suffocating. She went to the window and leaned out. It was the hour of dusk and witchery, when the great stone city blooms and softens under a gathering spangled web. Off to the east stretched Morningside Park, a dim green channel starred with light; beyond, a surge of housetops and innumerable windows breaking into gold.

Hung in the midst, the elevated line sent sinuous yellow serpents speeding along the gloom, rounding the curve southward, where a huge huddle of trees marks the beginning of Central Park.

Westward, above Riverside, she caught between the buildings a haunting glimpse of saffron sky.

Instinctively, her thoughts reached toward one whom the twilight always seemed to bring near;

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one who had never spoken a word of love to her, yet whose regard, in some mysterious way, seemed to have penetrated her inmost consciousness. She had met him merely in the formal world of business—that baffling world of barriers and cold reserves where ideals and emotions must conceal themselves to meet the hard commercial end; and where too often the real personality is completely hidden, even distorted, by the practical necessity.

Every circumstance had conspired to keep the acquaintance on a remote and unequal footing, until finally the association ended in a somewhat disconcerting way, leaving her convinced that she had somehow been misjudged, misrepresented. No, he had never really known her; and yet, with the confidence of the creative mind that must always see its images as real, she felt that he had cared. Though she had not seen him for months, the mere knowledge that somewhere in the same city he lived and worked had been the very pulse of her best endeavor.

But now, as she sent her thought across the dusk, her rapturous impulse was suddenly arrested. After all, might not this, too, be an illusion? He was a busy man of affairs, too busy for anything more than impersonal kindness.

Perhaps, even if he knew her suffering now he would not care. He would pity her, just as he

pitied a thousand others, but he would not really care.

It was as if a powerful lamp within her went out suddenly, the last lamp of faith in her soul. She drew back sharply and closed the window. She was conscious now of hunger that made her giddy. Downstairs she heard laughter and talk and the clinking of dishes. The shame of it scorched her. She must get away somewhere, anywhere, away from this degradation.

Without a plan, she put on her wraps and stole downstairs, out into the street. The clatter of a hurdy-gurdy struck at her misery like rude, insulting laughter. Starting eastward, to evade it, she changed her mind and turned quickly back. Better the hurdy-gurdy and homely, glaring sights, than the solitary beauty of that other street. Once its quiet and magic had been her daily inspiration, to-night she could not bear it.

On Amsterdam Avenue, the shops were awake. People hurrying home for dinner laughed and chatted, belated buyers besieged the groceries and delicatessen stores.

Once a group of acquaintances passed her, nodding pleasantly. One paused a moment, with solicitous questions. How was she getting on? Why didn't she ever come over to the house? Where in the world had she been keeping herself?

To think there was no one to whom she dared

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tell her extremity—no one who would understand. Suppose they could glimpse one hundredth part her desperation!

She walked on, her giddiness increasing. Everything seemed flung sharply at her vision, as if with conscious cruelty. People and objects stood out with a strange abruptness—a grocer's clerk in front of a store measuring tomatoes; a laundry wagon filling up with parcels; a woman looking at switches in a hairdresser's shop.

Through all of it the Amsterdam cars hummed and jolted past, and frequent automobiles honked.

But though her outer senses took in every noise and object in their range, her inner senses all revolved about one single fact. She must get the money, somehow. *She must get it*, or be put out into the street.

Where should she go? What should she do?

As she walked, she challenged the city with its infinite wealth, its illimitable sources of activity. But the city gave back no answer, save the relentless echo of her feet. To her passionate cry, there was no response, save that beat, beat upon inflexible stone.

The very thought of borrowing to her seemed almost like a crime. She belonged to a family that had so looked upon it, and the shrinking from it inhered in every fibre. To approach again the friends she had recently sought, would be like turning the thumb-screws in the rack; to

seek assistance from mere acquaintances would be like begging—yet what alternative was open to her now?

Suddenly a plan came. She remembered a woman who, though at one time in need, had recently married a man in comfortable circumstances. Several times in the past it had been in the girl's power to grant her certain professional favors, bestowed with no thought of return. The acquaintance, however, had been purely formal. A walk of ten minutes would bring Margaret to the house. She set her lips and went.

The family were at dinner and it was some moments before the woman emerged, smiling, with creases of prosperity in her puffed cheeks.

"Mrs. Hagerton, I assure you it is a great emergency, or I shouldn't think of coming——"

She scarcely knew what she said. She only knew that in a flash, the cheerful smile went out. A blunt, shrewd look replaced it, while, in dismal tones, the fortunate one dilated on the increasing hardness of the times.

Margaret Lapham breathed tempestuously as she turned away. She had done the unpardonable thing. She had asked for money.

Out in the street again, she walked at a furious pace. "I cannot do it—I cannot!"

Rather than suffer a repetition of the agony, she would go to one of the friends to whom

she had appealed before. She really counted little on it, for Mrs. Bowen was struggling with problems of her own.

The girl was not surprised when the distressed woman declared herself utterly unable to tide her over and frankly spoke her mind.

"I hope you see, Margaret, where this sort of thing will end. It's all right in theory, but in actual life it doesn't pay. You know I opposed you when you gave up a regular income for an uncertainty. I'm sorry for you, dear, but really, isn't it your own fault?"

"Oh, Katherine, what was the fault? Just that I had the faith that takes big risks—the faith every single human being must have had who ever accomplished anything in this world."

"But why not be practical, Margaret? If your work doesn't pay—"

"Katherine, it will pay, I *know* it. There's something in me that tells me, if I'll just hold on a while longer—just a *little* longer—I'll prove what is in me!"

"I'm afraid you're building on air, dear. New York is crammed with people, all hoping the same thing. Take my advice, Margaret. Do the work that pays the bills."

"Didn't I do it, Katherine? I did it for five years. You know my struggle. All my finer instincts suffered. My talent was blunted—it might

have been ruined. To do it again would be sheer waste."

"Well, then, do something else. Anything that means cash. Don't you see, child, you can't starve? Sooner or later you've got to do the thing you hate to do."

"Oh, Katherine, don't you understand? I don't hate it just because it is drudgery—the higher work is drudgery too sometimes. But the difference is—the difference is—" She got up suddenly from her chair. "One kind of work smothers the best in me—the other lets it out! Don't you see—I'm fighting for that. I'm fighting for the imprisoned splendor."

"The imprisoned splendor?"

"Yes—don't you remember Browning, in Paracelsus—"There is a hidden center in us all"—"

"Oh, yes, I remember." Mrs. Bowen spoke vaguely and nervously. Her recollection of Paracelsus was not really clear, and besides, she felt distinctly that the time had come for sane and balanced action in Margaret's affairs. The drawn look in the girl's face, the brilliance in her eyes, were a sufficiently strong argument in themselves to strengthen the older woman's sense of responsibility. She looked up anxiously as Margaret, instead of re-seating herself, began feverishly walking up and down, her voice more and more intense.

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"It's the first time in my life I've had a chance—even a breathing chance—to develop my higher gift. And even this I've had to snatch, guiltily, like one stealing forbidden fruit. I'm paying the price of it now—that's what it all means. Paying the price for my theft. Think of it! That I should be made to feel like a criminal, simply because—— Oh, Katherine! Can't you conceive what it is to be held in the grip of a great ideal? It's something tremendous, that *won't* be vanquished. It's obsession. Even if I tried to give it up I couldn't. The power would drive me to the end."

"But Margaret——"

"Listen, Katherine, all my life I've been forced to do anything, everything, except the one thing I was born to do——"

"Thousands in the world are making the same sacrifice."

"Let them do it if they can. I cannot. Do you think, now that I've got my chance, I'd fling it away so easily? No! It's my life and breath. I'll suffer for it, I'll borrow for it, I'll eat the dust for it, if need be, but I *will not* give it up!"

"Very well, then. If you starve, you shouldn't be surprised."

"I'll not starve, if I'll just be true. Oh, don't you see, Katherine, society is a body in which each member is fitted to do some one thing better

than any one else can do it. Each one, then, if he feels the call, should insist upon his work. He shouldn't *consent* to do the thing that doesn't represent him. If human affairs are so misarranged that he must fight for his chance, then let him fight. But it is treachery to give up."

"Well, you're certainly fighting, Margaret. But while you're fighting, who'll pay your bills? Why don't the Powers that gave you your gift provide the means to take care of you?"

"They will—if I'm true to my call. If I turn aside, they're no longer responsible. I shall have forfeited my right to their support."

"Dear, dear child—why can't you see it? You must go back, sooner or later, to the work you left."

"Never! I can't breathe that atmosphere. It is sulphur to me. I'd rather die than go back."

The other laughed. "Nonsense! You say it, but you don't mean it. People don't want to die when their bills are met and they can have three nourishing meals a day."

"Ah, but I did. Often! With every material want satisfied, I was wretched enough to die."

"You'll be happy enough, my dear, when your first week's salary comes in."

"Not I."

"Well, go back to it, can't you, for the *sake* of your art? For awhile, at least."

"It wouldn't be for the sake of my art. It would be for the sake of a living. It would be from fear, not loyalty or courage. Fear that I couldn't live by doing the thing I love. No, Katherine. The brave thing, the only thing for me is to stick as I am sticking by the higher call."

She had said that she was willing to bite the dust for the sake of her art, and she was soon called upon to prove it.

The next home she sought belonged to a pompous business man whom she knew not at all, but whose wife she had met casually on three occasions. As she went up the steps, she said to herself: "*I'm* not doing it. It's not Margaret Lapham who is stooping to all these things. *She* couldn't do it! There's some strange, pushing person in me—some fierce, persistent super-woman that I've never known before."

She hoped now to deal only with the wife, and was dismayed when Mrs. Jenkins took her immediately into her husband's den adjoining the reception-room.

He did not rise from his seat. He did not remove his cigar. His pudgy chin, sunk upon his collar, did not stir an inch.

He met his wife's request with an incredulous stare, while his entire countenance grew purple with alarm. He, too, could talk effectively on

the fearful cost of living. It was a national problem now.

"Everybody's in the same fix. Everywhere you go, you'll find a hard luck story. There's no knowing where it'll end. Wish I could help you, Miss Lapham, but it's out of the question."

As she went out, she heard him say to his wife: "Humph! What's the matter with her? Why can't she hustle like the rest of us?"

"Oh, she does work—at things that don't pay. She's a writer or an artist or something. She has ideals."

"Ideals! H'mph. What right has she got to 'em? Ideals won't pass for legal tender. There's just one thing in this world that will. People that haven't got it might as well get off the earth."

The girl turned again into the unfeeling brilliance of the street. Her body was shaking, her feet almost refused to carry her. The courtesy of this man belonged to that category of insults which she had never been able to endure. Snubs and incivilities, which other women in the business world tolerated as the inevitable penalty, had always set her blood rebelling.

So powerful was the force of this rebellion now that it mounted above fatigue.

"Let other girls stand it if they can. There's something in me that *won't* cringe. Oh, I *can't*

*live in a world where brain and talent are under the heel of money!"*

Pride was fighting hard in her, but the oldest, fiercest human instinct was fighting harder yet. Again she braced herself for the attack.

Of all the people she could summon now to mind, there was no one who had means enough to help her bridge the chasm. There was nowhere she could go, without hurting or depriving some struggling human being.

"And I can't do that. They're all working and pinching, just as I am. It would be nothing less than robbery."

By a drug-store clock it was now half-past eight. It had not been seven when she left the house. At nine she was still walking desperately, with no relief in sight. Each hour was pushing her closer and closer to the edge.

Straight ahead, a distance of several blocks, a hill of stars rose glittering to meet the dark. It was the incline that led on up toward Fort George. A rush of memories came. In the early days of ambition when she had braved the city with her burning faith, that hill had been a beacon, a nightly inspiration. Always, she had lifted her eyes to it, rejoicing in its glory, that was no more wonderful than her dream.

Oh, she had been invincible, in those days! Nothing could quench the fire in her. She had flung her arms to the city, feeling the pressure

and the spur of its life. She had cried, "I'll win. I *will* win! There is no power can keep me back."

To-night, as she looked, she uttered another cry.

Twenty minutes past nine. Soon it would be too late.

Had she, indeed, come to the end? Hope, still alive in her, leaped at sight of the postman, making his last deliveries.

"Anything for Lapham?" she asked him.

"Let's see—" He ran his fingers through a group of letters.

Margaret Lapham did not breathe. Time and space ceased to be while she stood waiting—

"Nothing for Lapham this time."

Something in her brain seemed to break. She stared at him blankly as he moved away.

To-morrow morning, she must go.

Where?

Fate had driven her at last, against the terror she could not evade. Caught in the clutch of this supreme panic, all else ceased to be. She felt the grip tightening about her faculties. Will and reason were shut off. Faith was throttled. There was nothing in all the universe but this one frightful Fact; this strangling moment, that cut off every avenue of hope.

"What *right* has she got to ideals? People that haven't money might as well get off the earth."

The voice rang through her panic—brutal,

pitiless. It rose louder and louder. It swelled to a shout. It filled the world.

*At last she knew.*

There was just one solution. There had been one, and one only, all along. Strange that it had taken all this anguish, this tempest and this struggle to bring her to a point which from the first should have been lightning clear! Torture in her ceased suddenly. As if an unseen bond had been abruptly cut, her mind seemed to drop the whole of its weight, sending her every sense soaring aloft into a high, keen, ecstatic region. In this rarified air, she breathed with an intensity that set her lungs strangely aglow.

The thought of death had never frightened her. Now, in swift illumination, it seemed a thing more natural than life. More natural; more wonderful; infinitely more to be desired.

The pharmacy was but two blocks away. She turned swiftly back. On the river she heard the slow, deep-throated call of vessels; the ferry whistles; the signals of innumerable craft out of the dark. They were all voices—trumpet voices—summoning to another world.

At the drug store she was well known. She was smiling when she turned away, with the bottle in her hand.

She passed all the familiar land-marks—the tailor's, the shoe-shining shop, the little tea-room, the stationer's, where she usually bought mate-

rials. They were places she would never see again, but somehow she was not sorry. She looked straight into the windows, and smiled again, with the knowledge of her great, bewildering secret.

The new emotion in her was a thing she could not name. It was keen enough for pain, yet it was not pain. It was huge enough for triumph, yet it was not triumph. It was a thing towering, immense, luminous.

Everything was luminous. People's faces, as they crossed her vision, shone with a marvelous incandescence. Light was everywhere; light and color and—sound!

All at once her senses opened wide to the fact. The city swarmed with sound. Out of the vast that had been semi-silence there came the rushing of a tremendous clamor. Something miraculous had taken place; as if, with her intention, the whole husk had dropped from the world. The blade of life had slipped its sheath, and her naked senses, terribly awake, pressed hard against the edge. It was a flaming edge. The feel of it was fiercely good. The fire of it spread and ran singing through her veins, thrilling her to the outermost rim of sensibility.

Suddenly she remembered—who was it that had said it? “If you knew you were to die to-night—if you knew you were to die to-night——” It was Maeterlinck. She recalled distinctly now.

"Would you, looking upon men and things for the last time, see them as you now see them?"

This, then, was what it meant; this terrific splendor, which, until now, had lain hidden behind the shell of life!

And the city! What had happened to the city? Its windows, tier upon tier, opened amazingly upon her sight, thousands of furnaces ablaze against the night. The very pavement beneath her feet seemed to expand and glow. It was not solid. Nothing she touched was solid.

It was a city of stone no longer. It was a molten, quivering thing, colossal with life and feeling. It ran rivers of feeling. It cried. It sobbed. It sang. She felt its million currents rushing to her; felt the warm human tide; heard the cry of those struggling ones, who panted and pleaded to do their work—

Ah, it was that, then. It was *their* cry she heard. Now above all other sounds; their voices, begging—for what? For the chance to breathe. The chance to live—the chance to prove the divinity within them.

"Striving to open out a way—"

The words came humming across her brain. Memory wavered.

"Opening out a way—" She had it now.  
"Whence the imprisoned splendor—"

It was what she had tried to tell Katherine.

"Struggling to open out a way!"

All of them were fighting for it, even as she had fought. And all of them were suffering. Suddenly she knew it, as if her veins were linked with theirs; as if her very mind were running with the stream of theirs.

She saw them fling themselves against the harsh commercialism of the times, beating their heads despairingly against the unyielding barrier. Their anguish was hers; she pleaded for them—the creative workers of the world; those who would not compromise; those who cried; "My work! Not another's work, but *mine!*"

She saw them pushed back, trampled down, because they could not pay. Trampled, as she was trampled. Left homeless, desperate.

Homeless!

Her hand closed quickly about the bottle. The pressure of it reassured her, like the contact of another hand. More and more it was like another hand; gripping hers; commanding her.

At home, in her room, would be best. She walked on steadily now, while plans formed rapidly in her mind.

The house was quiet, when she went in. At every landing, the doors were closed. She walked softly, with extreme caution, as if she would silence even the creaking of the stairs.

At last—the top landing; and her room. She entered and turned on the light. Then she went to the door and closed it.

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Immediately silence smote her like a blow. Then the silence was as suddenly unstopped. There came a ringing in her ears, tremendous, terrible; a sound such as she had never heard before. It was a surge—a singing—as of the invisible ethers rising like a great sea wave to rush in upon her.

She went to the bureau and unwrapped the parcel. Strange that one little vial could contain something powerful enough to break the dam, to open the way into that world of ringing ethers.

“Now!” said a Voice—that of the surge in her ears.

She lifted the bottle—

On the instant her glance—striking the mirror—recoiled at what it saw, then fixed in a frightened stare. Who was the stranger looking back at her, that wind-blown disheveled creature with black, strained eyes set in a chalky face? Her hat had tumbled back; her hair straggled; her dusty collar had twisted awry. She stared a full second before she knew. Realization came with a shock, but there came with it no sense of physical identity.

Already, in thought, she had parted with her body; she seemed to look at it now as something quite separate from herself.

Its disarray distressed her. Never in life had she permitted such untidiness. Surely in death,

she could not allow it. The house that had held her spirit must be left in order when she went away and others came to look upon it.

These clothes would be impossible. She must find something soft and fine, that would express in some degree at least the love of beauty in her.

As she searched her closet and chiffonier, it grew upon her every moment, how disorder seemed to prevail. How had her room become so fearfully untidy? Her keyed-up senses, alive to trifles, saw every object exaggerated, wholly out of focus. Chairs and rugs awry; dust, thick upon her books and table; heaps of boxes under the bed—a climax of confusion.

The habit of neatness, always strong in her, swung uppermost, demanding action. The more she worked, the more she was driven to work. She could not, somehow, stop. It was like mania.

Suddenly she dropped her work. Seizing paper and a stub of a pencil, she sat on the edge of the bed and commenced, furiously, to write. Always, when goaded thus, she vented herself in writing:

"Not because I am tired of life. Life never beat more fiercely in the veins of any human being than it beats in me. No one—no one, I repeat it—ever lived on this earth who had capacities more immense than mine. Oh, I want life! I crave it big and splendid! But it is denied me here. Everywhere I turn I am flung back upon myself unanswered. Everywhere I am baffled, wounded, hurt. I, who have not a mercenary instinct in

me, am forced to seek for money. I, who am glad to do my work, must beg. I, who am born to love, must go loveless. Somewhere among the host of shining spheres, somewhere——”

The stub of pencil broke. She did not try to find another. It did not seem to matter. Neither did it matter that the room was not yet fully straightened. She had forgotten all about it. Already she was losing connection with physical things.

She stood up, swaying, with a strange sensation in her arms, as if a new ethereal essence ran thrilling through them. She put out her hands and looked at them with a queer realization of their aloofness, as if they were no part of herself, but something she had used. They seemed to be hands no longer; but fine transparencies for an inner blaze.

Again the reflection in the mirror caught her. She gazed at it impersonally, guiltless of vanity. The girl she looked upon had smoothly brushed, dark hair and luminous eyes set in a delicately oval face. In her white, filmy dress, with the one string of vivid corals, she was a creature to be loved and cherished.

How could it be that she had so completely missed in life the things she should have had? How was it possible that in all the world there was no room, no breathing place, for her?

She asked it as a stranger might, standing off

and looking at this sister-creature, feeling a poignant pity for her.

"Poor little girl" she said. "You tried. You did fight, with all your strength. Perhaps, if you were a man, it wouldn't be so hard."

Somewhere in the house a clock was striking. She counted. It was midnight. Suddenly there started that ringing in her ears.

"Now!" said the Voice.

A star looked at her, straight and piercing, through the crevice of the transom-window, as if it had just appeared; on the instant, to beckon; to remind her—

She went to the window and pulled it fully open. Always, before going to bed, she looked up at the stars, seeking their substance for her rest and inspiration.

"Good-bye," she said. "It's for the last time. Unless, maybe, I'll be closer to you now."

Always, too, she had sent her good-night thought across the darkness, to that one.

"Good-bye" she said to him now. "You who will never know." She paused, while the pain of it swept her. "Oh, if you could know. If you could! I could go then, regretting nothing."

A thought—big, daring, wonderful—slipped into her mind. It wavered and dimmed; flickered again, then flamed to sudden beauty.

"Why not? Who says he should not know?

Why may I not tell him now—to-night—the thing I could not tell him if I lived?"

Her being rose to it, kindling with exquisite joy. Her hands were shaking as she drew the paper toward her and dipped the pen.

"Dearest"—at the mere writing of the word her whole frame trembled. She waited, striving for mastery, commanding her hands to obey her. At last they steadied:

Dearest: to you who have never spoken a word of love to me, because I am to die to-night I am making this confession. Were I to live I could not, for such is the irony of this life—the law of earth. But when you read this I shall have passed beyond such law.

I love you. Even as I write it my whole universe thrills with light. If it is shame to say it, then I glory in such shame, for this is an hour that shows me truth alone as beautiful. In all my thwarted, cheated life I have never, until this moment, been free to speak myself. But now, at last, all the perspective of life is changed. I seem to look down as from a breathless height—a height far above shams and lies, and pitiful conventions, and I can laugh and snap my fingers at the straws that once seemed insurmountable.

This hour alone is great.

For this one hour, then I will be brave, I will be absolutely true and fine. I will tell the truth—all the truth—and triumph in the telling.

Of course you did not guess. I passed through your life as scores of other women passed. I came and went coldly, practically; always with that wall between us. There must always be this wall, convention says. That is the object of civilization, is it not—to build up barricades about the soul so that one human being may never truly know the other?

How could you know that each time I came to you

it was with eagerness that could not wait to see your face, with trembling at the sound of your voice? That when I left you my thoughts clung? Long after I left you they clung. I could not, with all my will, draw them away from you.

Dear, you could never have guessed. And had you guessed, what then? Would it have made a difference?

Sometimes I have fancied that you knew. Sometimes, in a swift flash of faith, I have believed you felt as I felt. Oh, if you knew! How many times I have gone to you in thought and laid my cheek to yours and loved you. Dear, have you never felt it? Have you never suspected even the faintest breath of it? They say the ether carries every wave of sound and light and motion—that thoughts may travel through it straight to their goal. I wonder has it ever carried my thought to you?

Does it tell you every day at dusk that across the city's miles of stone and light the throb of my heart reaches for the throb of yours? Can you imagine, I wonder, you who are a man, can you imagine for a moment the happiness that I, a woman, have had in just caring for you in this ethereal way? Sometimes I have gone downtown and walked past the building where you had your office just to feel that I had been as near to you as that; not seeing you at all, just looking up and feeling a great comfort, a strange peace of heart, to think that maybe you were there.

Dear, I've done that. Does it seem foolish to you? Does it seem childish? I wonder, too, about that. The very street where your office is has a different look from other streets—from all the places near it. I said I would tell the truth. Absurd or not, I must tell it. To talk with some one who has seen you—even in a business way—that, too, is a comfort poignantly sweet. After a chance meeting the other day, with one who had recently seen you for but a moment, I went home walking on air. My heart sang. I could have hugged the world.

It has been the one joy, the one compensation life has held for me—my love for you. Through all my

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struggle and my pain and my doubt of other things, I have not doubted this. Always I've clung to the blessing of it—until to-day. Once to-day in my bitterness I doubted. But that is past. To-night has shown me the folly of my doubt. I seem to see now how all the sufferings of my life have blazed the way for this. All the harsh experiences were just for this, that I should lose the narrow sense of earth and reach this height; that I should look and see Love, large and marvelous—the greatest Force, the sublime Fact—in all this universe of swinging worlds.

If being born and suffering as I have suffered meant only this, it is enough to justify a thousand-fold my having lived. Oh, I would welcome them again—all the struggles and disappointments—if they would lead again to this.

What are humiliations now? You are to know. What is the anguish I have borne? You are to know. You are to look on my confession; you are to read these pages to-morrow and know the secret I could never tell in life. I love you so purely that this is enough. I love you so greatly that even to go away forever, never having known your kiss—even that I can bear if only I may tell you.

Oh, it is greater than kisses or embraces. It is my self speaking to your self, with no wall of flesh between. As I write, I seem to see you before me distinctly—just as you always looked to me; sitting at your desk, busy, abstracted, maybe; always reserved, but with that atmosphere of gentleness and kindness which made me feel that somehow you would understand as other men could not.

Do men love like that, I wonder? Would a man, by the mere writing of his love as I am writing it, experience in thought the rapture that I feel now? This, dear, for me is consummation—simply that you should know.

Will you know, I wonder, when this reaches you, that it is I who write? There is no way you may know save

by the straight, sure way of love. I shall not sign my name—I could not. Why need I? If you love me, if as I feel, you have thought of me as I have thought of you, the truth will drive home to the core of you. Beyond the slightest shadow of doubt you will know.

If you do not—oh, if you do not—

I will not think it. I will not let myself believe it. For this is my miracle hour. This is *my* hour of knowing.

She sealed and addressed it, crept downstairs and out to the mail-box half a block away.

"It's done," she said. "I can never recall it."

The thought was like a benediction.

She re-entered the house and started up the stairs. A clock began striking. One—two.

Two o'clock! Had she then lost so completely all track of time?

It was dim along the hallway. At a turn in the stairs, she almost stumbled. Two more flights—

What was that?

She stood abruptly still, with an alert, quick sense of danger. There was no sight of an enemy; no sound; no touch or hint of anything—

Nothing but that human instinct, awake in every fibre; that warning of a near-by terror—

She retraced her steps, peering cautiously into the shadows, while her blood chilled.

Now! She had it. One sense could call it by a name. Somewhere in the house, something was

burning. There could be no mistake—something woolen was afire; carpets or hangings were smouldering. Was it possible that in lighting her way downstairs, she had dropped a match?

But she could find no slightest evidence of that.

Now! She was tracing it—There, just by the second landing—right at Mrs. Elgers' door—

Margaret Lapham saw fully now. A thin blue line of smoke was curling out—the entire corner was gathering a haze—

Physical consciousness leaped to the front. She felt herself suddenly a giant. Flinging herself against the door, she called with all her might: "Mrs. Elgers! Mrs. Elgers!"

The door would not yield. Mrs Elgers' dressing room connected by folding doors with the front room just across the hall. In a moment, Margaret Lapham had aroused the occupants, a man and his wife. The three pushed their way through the thick smoke to the stupefied woman.

Margaret Lapham had always wondered what she would do in an emergency such as this. She had doubted that her wits would serve her quickly enough, and that physical command was strong enough in her to meet and conquer peril instantly.

She was astonished now to find herself devoid

of fear; swift and clear of thought; absolute ruler of the situation.

The other boarders, roused abruptly from sleep, were running about the halls, distracted, helpless. Miss Lapham alone seemed to be keeping her head. It was she who gave the alarm; she who got the physician and stood by, helping him, till Mrs. Elgers had fully recovered.

She moved calmly through the panic and confusion, an intelligence sure of itself, that finally brought order out of chaos.

The excitement lasted until the early milk wagons clattered through the street. Nobody thought of going to bed. With that love for sensation which is the weakness of human nature, people sat about rehearsing all the details; laughing hysterically, intoxicated by the thought of danger barely escaped.

"Isn't it a miracle," cried one, "that Margaret Lapham happened to be awake? Just suppose she hadn't! Talk about Providence—if *that* isn't proof!"

"But it *ought* to happen with Margaret Lapham," some one else spoke up; "for she believes in miracles. She says it's all according to what a person truly thinks and believes. Don't you remember what you said last week, Miss Lapham?"

"Yes," answered the girl, "I do believe in miracles."

Her wide eyes were fixed fully upon the questioner, yet seemed to look beyond her.

Escaping at last to the parlor, she shut herself in, that she might sit alone by the window and watch the waking street. She was there when the postman came with his first delivery.

"Letter for Miss Lapham!" William cried.

She roused herself and took it—staring dazedly at the envelope. It was from a source long since despaired of. She opened it and a check fell out, the largest check she had yet received for any of her work. Her head went down on her arms.

"How could I have doubted!" she sobbed. "How could I! Oh, if I could only cry it to all the discouraged ones: just to hold on—a day longer, an hour longer—just to wait!"

At ten o'clock she went to her room to rest. At eleven, Mrs. Elgers knocked and called to her regretfully.

"I hate to disturb you, Miss Lapham——"

"You are not disturbing me. I am up. Come in."

She was standing at her mirror, dressed for a walk, just pinning on her hat.

"I couldn't sleep!" she explained, "I couldn't even think of sleep——"

"My dear, there's a gentleman down stairs who *won't* be sent away. I never saw such a determined man—and so distracted! He's got

it in his mind you're hurt or something. I kept telling him no one was injured. But he wouldn't mind me at all. All he said was, 'I've got to see her. I've got to see her or I shan't believe.' So I said I'd ask you——"

Margaret Lapham took the card. "Oh——" she breathed; "Oh!"

Mrs. Elgers retreated before the glory of her face.

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## **THE CRAVING**

"Hence, may not truth be lodged alike in all,  
The lowest as the highest?"



## THE CRAVING

HILDA let her broom and mop clatter down the steps.

"It does no good!" she cried passionately. "It does no good!"

She sat down, midway of the ugly stairs, utterly exhausted and undone. Since sunrise, she had been struggling to better her surroundings, and nothing seemed one whit better. The hallway was still hideous, dark and narrow and full of smells. And upstairs, in the family rooms, it was just as bad. Revolutionary changes must come, before cleanliness could be—sunlight and facilities, decent plumbing, ventilation—a hundred luxuries wildly out of reach.

Hilda's brain grew dizzy, the more she thought of it. The vast majority of the drudging poor rebel blindly against their drudgery, not knowing the reason for it; wondering why they must put forth such tremendous energy to gain such small result. All at once, Hilda had seen why. Strange she had never grasped it before!—the pathetic feebleness of mere soap and water.

The girl rose painfully, reclaimed her working implements and mounted the stairs to her

room. It was a place apart from the family confusion, for which she was devoutly thankful. It gave her breathing space.

As she entered the door, the tumult of all outdoors rushed to her through the open window—a huge, unending roar, pierced by the sharp staccato of horses' hoofs. But she was used to that. All day long the cataract of noises tumbled through the street, shouting an accompaniment to her toil. Just beyond her window, the torrent plunged into a whirlpool of seething sounds, for here the elevated station focused the din.

Hilda went to the window and leaned out. Flung into visibility, the commotion she had heard leaped into color and action. Everything seemed to swarm. It was a cluttered street of wedged-in, jumbled shops and dwellings. Chinese laundries, pawn shops, museums, groceries, saloons, hardware stores, cheap lunch places, barber shops and tenements jostled and strained together, begging for elbow room.

The house she lived in, pigeon-holed between a cigar store and a second-hand dealer's, fell back helplessly into obscurity; but upstairs, its windows commanded a full sweep of the teeming thoroughfare.

Directly below her, the second-hand place protruded its rubbish. Dingy mattresses, broken stoves, beds and chairs sprawled upon the pavement. And just across the street, a dry goods

shop flashed its unspeakable cheapness in her face—limp calico dresses of green and purple, scarlet blankets covered with boisterous pink flowers.

“Ugh!” cried Hilda. “It’s awful. I can’t stand it.”

For Hilda had been out to service and had glimpsed another life. Her path and the path of the rich had crossed. For a breathless period, she had been privileged to touch the hem of wealth’s garment—a menial’s touch only, yet the thrill of that contact was with her yet.

She knew the difference now—knew it beyond forgetting.

“I can’t stand it!” she cried the second time. “And I won’t!”

She closed the window with a bang. The sound reverberated through her, rousing the full tempest of her rebellion. Everyone may have his refuge against intolerable surroundings. Hilda’s father and brothers found theirs in the corner saloon. Although she frowned at that, the girl had her panacea, nevertheless—another sort of intoxicant. The craving for it was on her now, wakened, in this climax of repugnance, to quick and vigorous life.

Not six blocks away, in a wide, smooth thoroughfare, wealth and fashion at this hour paraded. If she went now she would find herself

in the full surge of it, could slake her thirst with the tide at flood.

Even here in her cheap, mean street she felt the power of the magnet drawing her, heard the call of the Avenue, potent, irresistible; a high, clear, golden note, triumphing over the din.

In the small closet back of the washstand hung the one precious tailored suit that she possessed. Mrs. Preston Stevens had given it to her, cast off from her own exuberant wardrobe. Her former mistress had, likewise, given her a stylish turban and a pair of high-heeled shoes.

Hilda got them all out and put them on the bed. A transforming fire sprang to her cheeks and her hands moved feverishly. No wisdom of wit or sage has ever fathomed the why of a woman's fondness for high-heeled shoes. Hilda did not seek to understand it. She only knew that she was possessed by it; that the mere feel of the shoes gave her a pleasure, sharp and delicious, like a pang.

She put them on at once and gained a supporting sense of smartness that added zest to the activities of dressing. Tilting daintily about the room, anticipation leaped, thirstily, to pleasures ahead. One of these pleasures lay in the exquisite powder box and downy puff—trifles from the lavish toilet collection of Mrs. Preston Stevens. Hilda reserved their use for special occasions, that the joy they gave might be long drawn out.

The girl had a madness for powder. Not that she needed it, for her skin was clear and soft enough, but the touch of it and the fragrance thrilled her with inexplicable delight. With deep, slow breaths she inhaled the incense, feeling the ecstasy a smoker feels in his favorite cigarette. Or was it such bliss as the opium fiend knows, drawing in the fumes that shall transport him to his paradise?

Hilda, indeed, was transported—straight to that splendid time, when for a dizzy period of magic, her path and the path of the rich had crossed. She felt the glamour of it about her now, a voluptuous, caressing mantle.

Doing her hair was the difficult thing. It must have just the proper swirl under her turban. Hilda brushed it out with nervous strokes, darting quick, keen glances from her mirror to a picture on the wall and back again. It was the portrait of a famous society belle, cut from a magazine. The skill and beauty of her coiffure was a daily challenge to Hilda. The girl was grimly determined now to make a perfect copy.

Hilda's wall was crammed with pictures such as this, clipped from newspapers and magazines. Society at home and abroad; society at horse show and opera; society smiling composedly from an unchallenged height—this was the bewildering exhibition that made her world of color and

enchantment. These symbols were the food and drink that kept her Dream alive.

She had a sleek, sumptuous feeling as she left herself out of the door. The grime and clutter of the street were an insult to her splendor. Loathing swept over her, urging her faster and faster through the district she so despised. She dared not glance to the right or left, lest some ugly scene offend her. A line of grey-white clothes hanging on a roof caught her eyes before she knew it, flaunting a shameful remembrance. Her mother, too, had taken in washing—her own mother. Hilda drew a hurt breath, thrusting the thought from her. She was no part of that. She was different. The very fact that she had higher tastes, that she hated it so, that she could not endure it, proved she was different. Her parents and brothers . . . well, they did not care.

She shook the whole subject from her with the shaking of her skirt. Now she was leaving the hated neighborhood, emerging into clean streets where prosperity sat enthroned. It seemed a wizard transformation. Never before, Hilda thought, had the contrast been so sharp.

Now a street of clubs and hotels, where taxicabs and automobiles ranged in a long, glittering line, and where liveried men stood all day long and swung revolving doors. Here, milliner shops and brown stone dwellings and banks and more hotels . . .

At last—Fifth Avenue! Hilda's shoulders went up, unconsciously. Her head lifted, her chest expanded, she felt the shock and the spur of it in every nerve. Without her knowledge, her body took on the pose of the stylish women pedestrians, with chin thrust forth disdainfully and eyelids drooping.

It was her hour. For this brief snatch of time, she was one with the onward sweep of luxury, of pomp, of fashion. She felt in every reaching fibre the all surrounding presence of costliness. Nothing there was in all this region that was not costly beyond her farthest dreams. And the knowledge sharpened the edge of her craving.

For a keen, greedy hour she walked and watched and envied, glutting her vision, whetting her desire. At last, retracing her steps, she found herself directly opposite the Waldorf. On the instant, a daring wish that had often come to her flowered into full determination. She had never entered the Waldorf. She had only looked breathlessly from a distance, with creepy chills in her flesh at the mere thought of going in. Now she would go. Why not? The parlors surely were open to the public.

She felt the usual panic in her scurry across the street, right in the face of snorting vehicles that scarcely stopped for the policeman's signal. Now she was safe across. She pushed on boldly till she had almost reached the portals of mag-

nificence. Then she stopped short, quaking. Two splendidly gowned women, just descended from an automobile, bore down upon her, each a stern Nemesis in judgment on her daring.

Hilda did not enter. Instead, she passed on carelessly, as if her purpose had never been. Her cheeks were burning and her knees shook. A fearful thought drove home. There must be a difference, a sweeping difference, between her and those women who were not afraid. It was as easy for them to approach splendor as it was for her to turn the knob of her wretched tenement. What was the difference?

She walked on, raging, suffering. The glow and the magic were vanishing. It was the misery stage of her intoxication—the bitter taste in the mouth. All at once she felt the whole crushing force of it—the arrogance of solid wealth massed against her littleness. *She didn't count*—that was the sum of it. *She didn't matter in the least.*

Why didn't she? Why couldn't she? With all her feeble strength she struck out blindly against the Fact.

Dusk was coming on, and in every tower and window tiers of light sprang into bloom. Hilda was hurrying now. She did not know why—did not realize that she was eager to take refuge in her humble street because it was the only place where she could be somebody, the only place where she would count.

She was limping, for her feet ached wretchedly. Despite her pleasure in them, high heeled shoes were never comfortable for any length of time. Now the challenge of milliner's and tailor's windows struck her like contemptuous laughter. Costliness stung like a whip in the face.

At last—the hated neighborhood! Hilda turned into it, eagerly, sighing her relief. She felt strength coming to her now. Never mind! Some day, she, too, would ride in automobiles. She, too, would laugh and stare icily at the people that didn't count. *She would live that life!*

How she would do it, she did not know. But she would—some day.

Mounting the stairs to her rooms, all the determination she had ever known rushed to her aid in a fierce, final cry. Never had the vile odor of the hall lamp seemed so vile. Never had the mean passageway seemed quite so mean.

"I will be free from it. I will!"

At her own landing she paused at last, exhausted. Someone scuttled out of the kitchen door at the far end of the hall. "Hilda—Hilda!" It was her mother's hoarse, excited voice.

"*Ach*, Hilda—hurry in to them—a lady and a gentleman—swells! They've been waiting for you—*ach*—an hour!"

Hilda opened the door dazedly. Then she stood dumb. As if, by some strange magic, the force of her will had precipitated her desire in flesh

and blood—there, amid the cheapness of the family sitting room, sat two of the Invincibles.

There was no mistaking them—the young woman, proud of head, smart of attire, perfectly possessed, the young man, tall, good-looking and immaculate.

“This is Miss Hilda Gertz?” Her voice had the quality and inflection that belong exclusively to the cultivated few. “I am Miss Schuyler. And may I introduce Mr. Forbes?”

They were names the girl had read repeatedly in the charmed society list. She bowed several times, backing confusedly against the wall.

“We have come to ask a favor,” pursued the young woman, smiling.

“Yes, miss,” murmured Hilda eagerly. “Anything I can do, miss——”

“I hope you don’t think we’ve presumed,” the young man added, with polite solicitude. “Doubtless it seems most rude of us, taking possession of your home in this way——”

“Oh, no, no, sir! I’m sure it’s all right, sir. I hope you make yourselves at home. It is bad I keep you so long waiting.”

Hilda, conscious of extreme awkwardness, sat down on a green sofa that showed its stuffing. Miss Schuyler’s next words set her heart violently beating.

“As friends of Mrs. Preston Stevens, we have

come to ask your aid in a special work we are doing."

Friends of Mrs. Preston Stevens! Ah, she was right. She had known it must be, for she had seen their kind too often to have thought anything else. The room swam in sparkling haze.

"She sent you, then? She is got back from Europe?" She almost choked in her agitation.

"No, not yet. She is expected soon. But we have letters from her, with instructions." And Mr. Forbes smiled engagingly.

Then Miss Schuyler spoke. "You were—companion to Mrs. Stevens, were you not?"

Companion! The word struck Hilda's ears like music. No one had ever before spoken so of her position.

"Yes, miss," she managed to articulate. "I was—companion to her for a few months."

"Then you know, of course, of her great interest in recreation for young girls. You remember—she is president of the Committee on Social Recreation and Vacation Resources. Mr. Forbes and I are workers with her—officers in that committee."

"Oh—yes!" breathed Hilda. Back in her brain vague recollections stirred, of dance halls, clubs and reading rooms managed by the rich, where working girls might find diversion.

A painful uncertainty quivered. Did they

think of her as like those others—mere working girls—in need of charity?

Miss Schuyler's next words released her pulses.

"We have been looking for a long time for some well-informed, aspiring young girl who could take command of the work in this district—as an officer, I mean. We want someone who knows the neighborhood thoroughly. Do you not feel, Miss Gertz, that you would like to help these others—less fortunate than yourself?"

Hilda's chest heaved. So! Others did at last see her as she was! She had always felt that someone, sometime, must realize that she was different from the herd.

"You—you are awful kind," she stammered, with moist eyes. "I'd like to do it, if you think I can."

"Oh, we are sure of that!" young Forbes declared. "Mrs. Stevens persuaded us that you would be just the one. It has always been her wish to promote your interests in some way—place you in a permanent position."

"Oh, that is good of her—so kind!" said Hilda. She choked, this time with gratitude. "She used to say to me she would get me a fine place some day."

"Yes—a position that would represent you—give you a chance to show your real abilities."

Hilda opened her lips, but could not speak. These were the kind of people she had read of

in books and stories—far above the poor in station, yet able and willing to admit superiority wherever they found it, willing to go down into poverty, if need be, to discover the diamond.

What was it Forbes was saying? Hilda held her breath.

“Suppose we all go somewhere for dinner? We can talk things over so much better—arrange all the details. Will you allow us, Miss Gertz?”

Hilda, taken unaware, blushed and fluttered, turning to her mother, who up to this time had sat nodding and chuckling in her corner, tongue-tied with awe.

The pleased, proud woman spoke up quickly. “Yes, Hilda, go—go with the lady and gentleman.”

Now that her chance had come, the girl was frantic with fright. When she had gained the street with them she began to wonder wildly if everything about her was just right. Did the powder show? Was her hat too large? Were her cheeks too red to look refined? Her anxious eyes searched Miss Schuyler’s face, and hat, and coat, alert to see the difference.

A horrible thought came. Could it be that the rank odor from the hall lamp clung to her clothing, and did they notice it? In her nervous, excited state, a horde of fears attacked her. In spite of their kindness, were they, after all, ashamed of her?

That would depend upon where they took her. This much she decided quickly. If they were willing to brave the publicity of a prominent place—well, surely, there couldn't be anything so dreadful the matter with her appearance.

Now they were passing one of the smaller hostellries. And now another. They were advancing upon Fifth Avenue. Where were they going? Hilda's breath came now in little gusts.

They walked a bit north, then turned at the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and crossed. Hilda shivered—they were pausing directly before the Waldorf. She found herself holding back, conscious in this flashing moment of her thousand deficiencies, conscious that she had been a *menial*—

But they clearly had no such thought. To them she was an equal. At last she was sure of it.

They guided her in through the brilliant doors. Swift exhilaration seized her. It was like that she used to know, when, as a child, her father pushed her swing too high—far out and up; and on the perilous return she clung screaming to the ropes, feeling the fearful rush of air against her, with every nerve giving way.

Now they had reached the dining room. The floor seemed to lengthen out beneath Hilda's feet, stretching away into a blurred hundred miles. She walked on a feathery substance, like clouds,

aware of waltzing stars and of curious faces looking toward her——

Now the head waiter was approaching. Several waiters were hovering.

"Sit here," Miss Schuyler murmured, while the girl felt her coat removed as if by magic.

She did not know what happened next. Consciousness became a velvet hollow, padded so thickly she could scarcely think. Her own voice, echoing from this hollow, had a strange, distant sound.

All at once she found herself staring fixedly at the table. Dismay smote her at the array of spoons and forks. Which should she use first? Surely, she ought to know. She had read all about it, time and again, in the papers. But to save her life she could not have recalled a bit of it now.

Each hair of her head was an electric thrill of fright. One thing was certain: the moment must come when she would be obliged to decide. That one moment loomed before her—immense, inevitable.

"What shall we have?" Miss Schuyler was smiling. Hilda had hoped she would not ask her. She hadn't the faintest idea. She forced an answering smile through a parched stiffness of lips.

"You—you do the ordering," she stammered.

"Yes, of course. But I thought you might have some preference."

"No, thank you, miss. I'll leave it with you."

Beads of perspiration stood out sparkling on her upper lip. She felt her hands grow moist and hot in their tight gloves.

"A cocktail?" her hostess was asking gently.

"Oh, no—that is—yes—no. I never take anything to drink." The next instant she felt that she had betrayed her ignorance. Of course, all "swell" people had wines with dinner. It showed she was a nobody.

"Won't you, please?" It was Forbes now who spoke.

"Certainly—yes, if—if you wish."

Now she was uncomfortable, because she had said no when Miss Schuyler asked her. Fear, grown poignantly prophetic, showed her a host of blunders ahead.

"A Martini?"

"Yes, miss. I think so."

What other kinds were there? She had forgotten, but she would risk that, anyway. Now she thought of her hands rigid under the table. She could not keep them forever hidden, but she hated to display their redness, with the gloves removed.

A sort of roaring started in her head, deafening her. Now she must produce her hands, for the waiter was bringing the cocktails. She did it

desperately, striving to appear indifferent. Her anxious eyes watched every move of Miss Schuyler, sipping her glass with calm, unhurried grace. By watching her hostess closely, she could be safe in everything.

That was what helped her in the matter of spoons and forks. Before she knew it, the worst of the agony was over. The entire fish course had been achieved and the world still turned on its axis.

"And now—we'll talk about the Recreation Center," suggested Miss Schuyler brightly.

Hilda felt a great relief. On that comparatively familiar ground she could steady herself somewhat.

"White wine, or red?" someone was murmuring.

Hilda did not know which to take, so her hostess smiled indulgently and ordered for her.

Suddenly there came the sound of tuning violins. Hilda's pulses leaped. She had the true German's love for music. All at once every vestige of fear and discomfort vanished for her. She became aware that she was talking easily, as she had never talked before.

After a while she gained sufficient courage to look about her at the hats and diamonds of the women guests. *This was society!* She told herself so, breathlessly. She was no longer an out-

sider; she was one of the sumptuous throng she had so often watched.

She leaned back, sighing softly. Her arms had a delicious, leaden languor; her brain was luminous as with electric light, and her blood sang. A wonderful contentment wrapped her about; a large knowledge that the world was good, that people were adorable, music divine, and herself the happiest mortal in existence.

Glancing up, she caught the look Forbes gave her. It was a full, shining look—straight from the depths of an undoubted admiration. Others had called her pretty—others who didn't count. But this was the first time that a man of the world, a man of taste, had given her that smiling glance of approval.

She felt self-consciousness coming on again. Miss Schuyler rescued her.

"Mrs. Stevens will be relieved to know that you are taken care of," she remarked. "She would probably have looked after it long ago, but of course she has had such desperately important things to worry her——"

Hilda looked up quickly. She had known much of Mrs. Stevens's family difficulties, but she was not sure that Miss Schuyler referred to that.

She waited.

"You mean"—she ventured at length, guardedly.

Miss Schuyler lowered her eyes. "One hesitates to talk of it," she said quietly.

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Hilda.

Her hostess raised her eyes frankly at that. "I didn't mean it as a—rebuke at all," she said. "But of course it is very unfortunate—the scandal and notoriety that must come."

"It is a great pity," Forbes observed, "when a woman of Mrs. Preston Stevens' calibre permits her marital difficulties to get into the courts. We're all terribly sorry about it."

"Into the courts!" the girl cried, before she knew it. "Then there is a *divorce*?"

A swarm of memories came. Hilda, though but a short time in Mrs. Preston Stevens' service, had been in touch with the most vivid experiences of her mistress's life. She had been genuinely touched by the woman's predicament, and she had served her loyally.

"It seems a divorce is pending now," Miss Schuyler answered, with evident reluctance. "Preston Stevens will sue. He makes—rather unfortunate charges—against her. Of course she will fight the suit—at least, we are looking to her to do it." She changed the subject abruptly. "Gossip is such a fearful thing. I detest it."

Hilda felt unmistakably guilty now. She sat bathed in the unhappy consciousness that Miss Schuyler had thought her curious, even rude. But in spite of herself, she ached to know the rest.

She had supposed, all this while, that the husband had forgiven, that all misunderstanding had been cleared up. All sorts of apprehensions assailed her now.

She had been very close to the heart of that storm-tossed period. Even the family servants, retained for years, had not been favored as she was—she, who had clung but a dizzy season to the garment of wealth.

That weakness of human nature, the spirit of bragging, sprang to ardent life in the girl. She could not bear the thought that Forbes and Miss Schuyler should not recognize her importance.

"I—I hope you pardon me," she made bold to say, "if I am so curious about Mrs. Stevens. I—I—"

Then her stammering agitation loosened unexpectedly. Unwonted fluency came to her aid.

"I know more about Mrs. Preston Stevens—more about that whole trouble—than any other person, even her own mother. Mrs. Stevens told me so herself, many and many's the time."

The moment the words were out, she experienced a slight shock, a soft wonder at her own daring. Then shame covered her. Would Miss Schuyler ever forgive her? Now, indeed, she had committed the unpardonable sin.

But there was no expression except kindly sympathy in her hostess's glance.

"Indeed?" she responded. "That certainly is

interesting. One should esteem it an honor to have the confidence of Mrs. Stevens."

Forbes, too, was looking at her with earnest attention.

"You must agree with us, then, that it is most unfortunate her name should ever have been linked with that of Scarza. I think her friends—most of them—blame her for that. Of course we don't—we take the other side. But the others—her family, particularly—blame her most decidedly."

Hilda's loyal spirit leaped to the defense.

"Blame her! Why don't they blame *him*—the husband? It was every bit his fault. She could not help it that her name was put with the opera singer. Why did the husband not *protect*?"

"That is our contention exactly. But her family feel that she should never, for any reason, have permitted—"

"*Ach!*" protested Hilda fiercely, reverting to her parent tongue. "That is it—that is it. But those others, they don't know what I know. She is not the kind to have such affairs. Her husband—he *drove* her to it!"

"Drove her? Oh, that is impossible! Preston Stevens was too kind and considerate—"

"Considerate!" spluttered Hilda. "Kind! If that is what you call kind. To be always swearing at her, and torturing her, and jealous of her

—never a day but what he was putting detectives on her——”

“Detectives!”

“Yes—crowds of them. She was hounded day and night. They sit on her doorstep; they run after her carriage; she was most crazy. She sat up all night, crying. He was a brute. He struck her. I saw him strike her.”

Hilda had at last gained the full attention she craved.

“This is all a revelation to me,” Forbes asserted. “It doesn’t seem possible that Stevens—and yet, he might have been fearfully upset about something. Perhaps that was the time he found the letters—Scarza’s letters——”

“*Ach—but he did not find the letters!* He only suspect about that. I always took good care——”

She bridled, flushing scarlet, conscious that this might be betrayal.

“But, besides”—she gasped and floundered—“they was nothing but such letters a gentleman should write. Anybody could see by them how fine and every way a gentleman the young opera singer was.”

“Oh—we have no doubt of that,” Miss Schuyler hastened to state. “His sympathy for her was unquestionably of the highest quality.”

“It was splendid of you to protect her as you did,” Forbes applauded. “She should feel eternally indebted to you.”

"No doubt she does realize the indebtedness," suggested the hostess, smiling.

"Yes. Miss Gertz may depend upon it, Mrs. Stevens will see that her future is cared for."

"Oh—that is no matter," protested Hilda. "I did it not for a reward. I wanted to save her from troubles. No, indeed!" with a little triumphant laugh. "Mr. Stevens could not get those letters. I always took good care."

The sound of the words repeated had a stimulating effect. Her mind swelled and glowed with memories that rushed. One recollection, like a rocket, shot up brilliantly, illuminating all her brain.

"To the last—yes, right up to the very last day. You know about how everything broke up and she hurried away—across the water? That was when I find a whole box of these notes from the opera singer. She leave them by mistake—she thought she packed them in her trunk. I got them before anybody could see. And I have kept them ever since—locked up at home—till she comes back. I keep them safe and sound—for her."

She had flung the bomb. She had uttered the supreme proof of her importance. She knew it by the tense silence that greeted her words.

Miss Schuyler drew a long breath. "It is the first time," she said, "that I have ever gotten at the truth of that unfortunate story. You are

probably the only one who has sufficient authority to speak at all. I am indebted to you for clearing it up."

Hilda leaned back in her chair and strove to seem calm. At last—she did count! She was somebody! To-day she had writhed and crawled with the lash of wealth in her face. She had been but a speck in the whirl. To-night—

All the way home she glowed with this exultation. At the door her new-found friends shook hands with her, declaring they had never enjoyed an evening more.

"To-morrow afternoon Miss Schuyler and I will call again and take what report you have about the needs of this district. In the meantime, do you not think you could collect considerable data? We don't wish to rush you, but an entire morning given up to it might accomplish much."

Hilda's willingness rose to conquer every obstacle.

Miss Schuyler turned, with a pretty graciousness. "One of these days you must come to my house for tea. I want you to meet some of the younger members of the committee."

As Hilda went up the ugly stairway, she lifted a transfigured face to the hall lamp. It was vile no longer—something had happened to change it. The blaze of it was like the blaze that gyrated at the top of her brain.

"One of these days, very soon, you must come to my house for tea!"

The music of that sentence rang in her ears all night. The day had been too much for her—she could not sleep. Her mind was on fire. Toward morning, at last, she dozed, to dream of Paris hats and gowns; of balls and dinners and cotillions; of going to Miss Schuyler's house and meeting a charming company of girls . . .

The triumph of it was more than worth any agony she had suffered, Hilda told herself in her dream. It was worth even her tortures at the Waldorf dinner . . . Then she awoke and consciousness finished the sentence. Such humiliation would never be again! She was initiated now—initiated once for all.

The rest of the week was a whirl of surprises for Hilda. One day came a dainty note from Miss Schuyler. Would she like to attend the theatre that night? "You have been so good in helping us with our work—please let us return in some small measure the kindness."

The following evening they went again to the Waldorf for dinner.

The greatest surprise of all for the girl was the growing attentiveness, the marked admiration of Forbes. It troubled her seriously at first. She had supposed, somehow, that he and Miss Schuyler were engaged. True, she had no real cause to think it—the two were merely co-workers in

the Recreation Committee. And yet, each time she found her heart bounding at his glance she experienced a sense of guilt.

But she could not deny the triumph it gave her. With all the other's beauty and advantages, her culture, her exquisite clothes, he had eyes for her—for little Hilda. There was no denying it. In the lambent knowledge of the attraction, the girl's fresh comeliness blossomed into something akin to beauty.

One night as the two stood together in the theatre, waiting for Miss Schuyler, Forbes dared to put into words the approval that had been glowing in his eyes.

"You actually dazzle me to-night!" he said, half laughingly, yet with an undertone that sent its thrill of sincerity.

Hilda's eyes were pools of light. Her lips budded.

"Oh, but I am not so dazzling as—as her!" she retorted, intensely conscious.

"As who?" he asked lightly.

Hilda looked at him. "You ought to know," she stammered.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"You—you are engaged to her—aren't you?" She had blurted it out, in her uncontrolled eagerness to know.

Comprehension lighted his face.

"Oh," he observed, with a deep drawn breath, "that is entirely a misapprehension."

All during the play she was conscious of his eyes, fixed on her with that shining gaze.

That was the night she dreamed that he came to see her without Miss Schuyler. If it really occurred, she told herself next morning, it would prove beyond a doubt that he had meant it, that he really cared.

It was a mad dream, but madder things had been. She thought of all the actual cases in modern life, girls who, through startling marriages, had leaped at a bound from poverty to wealth. Hilda had a scrap book filled with all the stories. She got it out and read feverishly until noon. At one o'clock a large, smart box came from a fashionable florist's. The girl, with frantic fingers, unfastened the cords.

She uttered a cry when she saw the lavish gift of violets. Her eyes blurred so that she could scarcely decipher the name on the card. And when she had read it, she took the violets with her to her own room and shut the door. There she sat for a full half hour in the presence of the flowers, now pressing their divine coolness against her hot cheek, again holding them off at arm's length to look at them, then burying her face in them utterly, while the world spun round and round.

It was a little after three when a knock sounded at the sitting room door and Hilda opened it, to see Forbes standing there—alone. She was at once covered with an embarrassment so painful that for several seconds she stood facing him without a word.

"I—I haven't done much work," she began, when she had found her tongue. "The whole morning went before I—I haven't any report to make——"

"You needn't trouble about that," he assured her, with his quiet smile. "I didn't come to talk business. I came—just to see you. That is, if you have no objection."

She sat down, frightened, awkward. Now that her dream was coming true, she was afraid to look in its blinding face.

She felt how wretchedly out of place he was, sitting amid these surroundings. Every moment the dingy walls grew closer and closer. Her two small brothers kept thrusting their tousled heads through the door, till shame overwhelmed her.

Forbes, with ready tact, took in the situation. "Shall we walk?" he suggested.

They strolled for an hour, first through Madison Square, then on to Fifth Avenue. Hilda's embarrassment only increased. She was afraid to meet his eyes, afraid to talk. Every time her companion turned the conversation to herself she

trembled away from the subject. For safety, she talked of Mrs. Preston Stevens.

It was when she reverted to the letters that Forbes spoke of something he had apparently intended to mention before.

"By the way, there is one thing that troubles me. Miss Schuyler and I talked of it the first time you told us about your having rescued those letters. I said nothing that night, for I didn't wish to belittle your achievement, but——"

"Why — didn't I do right? You don't think——"

Hilda turned her eyes fully on him in frank dismay.

"Well, it rather worries me to think that—— Didn't it ever occur to you that Mrs. Stevens might have missed them and been terribly distressed all this while, not knowing where they were? You see——"

"Oh, but I did intend to give them to her— just so quick as she come back. I was keeping them just for that. I—good gracious!" She stopped abruptly in her walk. "I never thought of it that way before!"

And truly, until this moment, it had not occurred to her.

The whole truth rushed over her—how negligent she must have seemed, how indifferent, after all, to the interests of Mrs. Stevens. In

spite of her anxiety to do the right thing, she had blundered fearfully.

"Oh, dear!" she bewailed. "Gracious!"

"Oh, come—it isn't so bad as that. You shouldn't worry so—"

"But I can't help it," panted the girl. "I can't rest now till it is all set straight. If I could get the address—"

"We have the address and can give it to you at any time, so put it all out of your mind."

But Hilda could think of nothing now but the letters. She smarted under the realization that her new friends even for a moment questioned the wisdom of her actions regarding Mrs. Stevens and was eager to prove to them her real motives.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," she insisted. "We'll go back now and get the letters and take them to the express office right away. I would be 'most crazy if I thought I make trouble for her."

She was as good as her word. When they had reached the house, she went at once in search of the box, while Forbes entertained himself with the family photograph album.

When she returned, she saw that he had selected a photograph of her and was gazing at it intently. He looked up, with a conscious flush, as she entered.

"I—I like this picture of you," he said. "I like it extremely."

"The one on the wall is better," she replied, glowing beneath his look.

She stood breathless, waiting. "If he really cares," she said to herself, trembling, "if he really means anything serious, he will ask for my picture. That is what proves a man's intentions. That is what *proves*."

Suddenly, turning from the picture on the wall, he spoke. "Do you know—I'd like awfully well to have one of those photographs." He stammered it, like any schoolboy, and blushed as red as she.

"I'll—I'll bring you one of mine the next time I come, if you'll give me yours."

But when she had given it to him, self-consciousness overwhelmed her. To hide it, she began hastily to wrap the box of letters she had brought.

"Let me help you." He was by her side in an instant. She thrilled at his ready gallantry. It was always so—he never failed, even in the slightest thing.

"You haven't said," he whispered, "that you want my picture. Won't you say it, Hilda?"

For answer she let her eyes drink to the full of his.

Her hands fumbled over the box. "If you give me the address, I can take it. Or perhaps—" She hesitated to ask a favor.

Forbes, alert to anticipate her littlest wish, himself offered to do the errand.

"Good-bye—till next time." He held her hand till it hurt. But the pain was joy.

Miss Schuyler had promised to come the next afternoon and Hilda was disappointed when a note arrived instead, stating that the visit must be postponed because of an unusual rush of work. Forbes would come later, the girl was certain.

As the afternoon wore on and he did not come, she concluded that evening would bring him. But evening passed without him.

All the next day she listened for a messenger or a florist's wagon or some evidence, some explanation. But the hours dragged by without another word from either of her new-found companions.

They had been overwhelmed with work, Hilda assured herself. By nature loyal, she had no thought of blame for them.

Two days more—and not a single message, not even a postal. A week went by and Hilda, alarmed at last, called up the telephone number Miss Schuyler had given her in case of emergency. But it was the number of a commercial

house. Even in that, it seemed that she had blundered. Why had she not listened carefully when it was given her?

And, after all, she did not have Miss Schuyler's house address.

Hilda was certain that in some way illness or harm had come to her friends. It was this that tortured her, with the knowledge that she had no way to reach them.

Walking one day near Madison Square Garden, the memory of that last afternoon came back with a rush of sweetness and pain.

The boys were calling afternoon papers. She paused at the newsstand on the corner, for it was here she always purchased. A name, flung forth in large black type, caught her glance at once—

#### MRS. PRESTON STEVENS.

Then she caught another word—DIVORCE.

"It's out, then!" she said, with a quick pang of pity for her former mistress. "It's out about the divorce—Miss Schuyler said it was coming."

She could scarcely wait to take the paper from the dealer's hand. "Poor Mrs. Stevens—" She pushed on toward the park, where she could sit and read. "It's *too* bad—"

She stopped short, with a strange, guttural cry. Another name had leaped—

#### HILDA GERTZ.

She read it and reread it, her brain still stunned from the blow.

HILDA GERTZ, FORMER MAID OF MRS. STEVENS, TELLS WHOLE STORY OF SCARZA'S ALLEGED INFATUATION.

She stumbled. The landscape, with its trees and buildings, the park, the benches, went out in a swift blot of black. Consciousness conquered. She picked herself up dazedly, and went on, clutching the paper. Then it was she saw her picture—her own picture—flashed across the page.

"Why it's—it's the same one—the *same one*—"

Realization, swift as a sword, plunged, straight and relentless, red to the hilt with her suffering.

She found a bench and sank upon it. Her eyes did not leave the print.

ADmits SHE WAS GO-BETWEEN—TOOK LETTERS BACK AND FORTH—SCARZA'S LOVE LETTERS PRODUCED.

And there were the letters, column after column.

Hilda, blind and deaf to all else, read on. Dusk came and found her still sitting there. Once only she lifted her voice:

"Oh—I didn't know—I didn't know there

was in this world—people so cruel as that! I didn't think people *could*—”

Speech snapped. Her teeth were chattering. The chill that gripped her struck to the marrow.

Not many blocks away, in a gay little cafe, Grace Todd, alias Miss Schuyler, and Bert Tenny, once known as Forbes, were “celebrating.”

“We beat 'em all—we beat 'em all! Whew! But wasn't it a clean-up? Jones will raise the bonus to one hundred. He told me so to-day.”

Miss Todd, star writer of the *Whirlwind*, sighed a huge sigh of elation. “Wasn't it great?” she triumphed. “We've got every other sheet in town crazy over the stunt. I can see them now, tearing their hair to know how we did it. How do you suppose Jones ever got on to the clue?”

“Give it up. He's a wonder, is Jones. But, say!” Tenny doubled up at a side-splitting remembrance. “Did you hear about the *Rocket*? Ha, ha! The only others who got wind of the Gertz folks had to get it wrong. They thought the former maid lived in Philadelphia. Sent Webb over there, and he's wandering around the Quaker City yet. Gee! I can see Webb's expense account.”

“They say the *Planet* fired two of their reporters—they've been working on this thing for five months. Say! Can't you see the sickly

green tinge of the *Planet's* complexion when our first edition came up?"

Miss Todd sighed again. "But do you know, I feel awfully sorry about that little girl. It actually hurt me!"

"Oh, slush! You'll never be any good at this game if you get soft-hearted. Cheer up!"

Miss Todd flicked a shining something from her eyelash. "She was falling in love with you, Bert. She was, really!"

Tenny blew a disgusted breath of cigarette smoke. "Please don't insult me!" he said.

## **WHEN THE WOMAN INVITES**

**"A baffling and perverting carnal mesh  
Blinds it and makes all error."**



## WHEN THE WOMAN INVITES

THEY had been discussing the eternally interesting question in the veiled, futile way conventional women have, when one of the guests startled the company by saying, vigorously:

"A woman has a perfect right to go forth boldly and claim the man she loves. Only the mustiest kind of tradition would keep her from it."

The speaker was an old lady, a sojourner in this autocratic New England suburb; wealthy, much traveled, somewhat of a Tartar, yet so sound and human at heart that people usually forgave the sting of her sharpest speech.

Being a thorough cosmopolitan and a confessed free lance, she cared not what bomb she threw into the traditions of the Pilgrim Fathers; indeed, she had come to this reception with the secret hope of an opportunity to fling as many as she liked.

"Any woman is a fool who waits for the man to make the advances. She herself must reach for him, must send forth fibres of attraction to draw him. Obey this law, and you marry. Fail

to obey it, and you don't marry. And there is the solution in a nutshell."

"But surely, Mrs. Bradford——"

"Tush, tush! A woman may marry any man she sets out to marry. A spinster is one of three things: a woman who doesn't want to marry, a woman who is ignorant of her own powers, or a woman who hasn't the gumption to use them."

Twelve indignant women started to protest at once, and this is how the real argument started which was destined to take the community by its languid spine, shake it until its teeth rattled, and set it down again to gasp and splutter for months to come.

One face there was in the group that really woke up. It was that of the most charming woman present and undoubtedly the youngest—she might have been anywhere from twenty-seven to thirty-four years old, so inexplicably were maturity and youth blended in her appearance.

It was she who remained upon the veranda after the others, in various stages of righteous indignation, had rustled off to the refreshment room.

"You've given them something to think about, anyway," she told the trouble maker, advancing to her chair. "Perhaps"—extending her hand—"you don't know me, Mrs. Bradford?"

"Oh, yes—I know you. Who in this village

does not?—Suburb, I should have said; pardon me. I hadn't been here a day when I was told all about your illustrious family, past and present. You are Inez Caton Ayres, the novelist, and you live in that delightful homestead with the cosey balconies, halfway up the hill. Just now your aunt and sister are abroad and you are alone, save for your stalwart house-keeper and bodyguard, Frieda. You rise every morning at six, breakfast lightly, go at your writing and work till noon. Then——”

“Dear me!” the other laughed. “How much more do you know about me?”

“You are much sought after and admired by women. But you are wedded to your work, consequently you have few men friends and no suitors. You ought to have a husband; you will never have one in your present state of mind—there, there! Don’t be offended. It’s a pity to see that face of yours cloud over. Can’t an old lady play fortune teller if she wishes?”

“Please don’t think I’m offended. I——”

“Sit down. I like you. We can wait for our tea and things, can’t we? Let’s have it out. I’m blunt, I know, but you can’t expect to change an erratic old lady all in a moment.”

The other sat down, smiling, though the new expression did not quite lift from her face. She looked straight into the eyes of her censor.

"Men do like me," her tone was quiet with driving power, "and I have as many men friends as I wish. But—I know how to keep them where they belong."

"Ah—that's just it." Mrs. Bradford had scored. "Isn't that just what I said? You know how to keep them where they belong, so you have no lovers."

"I don't want lovers," flushing.

"Do you mean that, or are you shamming?"

"Shamming!" faintly.

"Women are trained to lie so about their emotions it becomes the habit of their brain to sham."

"I've simply been too busy to think about men in that way." Miss Ayres had drawn a tangible substance of reserve about her.

"So, so. I've met other women who labored under the same delusion; that was their explanation, too. That's the explanation of your friends for you. 'She can have any man she wants,' they tell me, 'but she's too busy to bother with men.' They are deceiving themselves, and so are you. Now, listen; I'm going to tell you something. You won't like it, but I'm doing it for your own good. It isn't a question of having time or not having time. It's just this: you're not a man's woman. If you were men would flock to you whether you would or no; your word would have nothing to do with it. You simply couldn't keep them away."

Her listener made no attempt to reply, but sat helpless, her breath quite taken from her.

"You're too repressed—you don't go out to men. As for falling in love, you'd be ashamed of it. Yet by the way your face kindled this afternoon . . . Come! You're a clever writer and you have opinions. Dropping the personal issue altogether, wasn't it sound doctrine I gave them?"

"I—it is difficult to say. You shocked us all and the shock seemed good, but . . . How can a woman know, how can she judge at all, unless she has actually experienced——"

"Ah! that's what I wanted to get out of you—you've had no experience; yet you claim to be a writer! You send forth novels to the reading public. You sheltered women amaze me, writing your sophisticated books. How in the world do you do it?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Sometimes I think it is a consciousness above my own that writes, not mine at all."

"Maybe. When will you begin to write from your own? See here, my dear, we'll not beat about the bush. You don't have to tell me—it stands out all over you. Of life you know nothing; you are naïve as a schoolgirl, ignorant as are all insulated women—one needs only to read your books to see that. Ah—I've hurt you now, but it's the surgeon's knife. I'm inter-

ested in you; I want to see you do something big. But above everything, I want to see you happily mated. Come! Have you forgiven me?"

"Tell me one thing." The other woman sent a swift upward look, shy, yet daring.

The old lady was charmed. "With all my heart!"

"What is a man's woman?"

"Bless the child!" The sharp, aged eyes pounced upon her in a delighted glance. "*You* shouldn't ask it, of all women. Just be yourself, without regard to rule or rote, and you'll not need a definition. Ah! . . . here comes Miss Marlboro, with sandwiches and tea, determined to put an end to us."

Inez Ayres, moving homeward up the hill in the dusk, felt that her world had swerved upon its axis. Yet somehow, she was not afraid; she even welcomed the prospect of the final crash.

For a week she was conscious of chaos. To the friends who discussed the dominant topic, she was non-committal, even remote. Their words were as infant babblings in the presence of the Cosmos.

Even Frieda was aware of the change. She whom the old lady had called Miss Ayres' body-guard, felt all of it, in the simple, inexplicable way primitive minds grasp the intangible. She had only to look at her mistress' face to know

that back of its seeming calm, something wholly out of the ordinary was taking place.

"Frieda."

"Yes, Fraulein."

Miss Ayres, descending the stairs, had intercepted the faithful German woman as she approached the library with mop and duster.

"Don't try to clean in here to-day"—she said it in a strangely breathless little way, not at all like her own way—"I shall need the study; I have work to do."

This, too, was unlike Miss Ayres, being directly opposed to previous instructions. Frieda took her bewilderment back with her to the kitchen, while her mistress went into the study and closed the door.

She closed it firmly, with a lingering pressure on the knob; she must be alone, absolutely, shut off from all that was alien. . . . Even closing the door was not sufficient; she went to the window and drew the shade against the too intrusive sunlight.

Then she glanced quickly at the clock, went to the telephone and lifted the receiver. Suddenly a trembling seized her hands, and before the operator could reply, she had put the receiver back upon its hook.

She stood in the middle of the room, hands pressed to her throbbing cheeks. Yesterday, from the calm, judicial regions of her mind, she

had made the decision, but now, in its execution, she was anything but calm and judicial.

"Absurd!" She gave a low, hysterical laugh.

She, the accustomed hostess, with generations of hostesses back of her, to tremble before this perfectly simple proceeding!

True, it had been quite different, inviting men whose cousinly attentions she had known from girlhood; yet, even so . . .

"There's no possible excuse for it!" she sharply rebuked herself.

She paused—*ah, the thing in her mind*—was not that what made the difference?

She tried again. "Hello! . . . Operator? Oxford 2343, please. . . . Yes. . . . Can't you get them? Oh, busy. Very well. Will you call me?"

She waited, while time flooded and ebbed. Then, at the sharp signal, she started like a guilty child, about to taste the forbidden sweet.

"Yes? Is this Oxford 2343? Will you connect me with——"

She stopped short, for a dominant voice vibrated richly over the wire.

"Oh, this is the private office? Why . . . "

She gasped and was helpless. Through some error, straight connection with the inner sanctum had been made, without the usual red tape.

It was his voice that had answered. Her courage went like water. Promptly disguising her own voice, she assumed curt annoyance.

"What number is this, please? Oh, I beg your pardon—I asked for Oxford 2434. I am very sorry." And she hung up.

It was no use—she simply could not do it.

"My whole training, my entire subconsciousness, is against it. I'd have to make myself over to do it."

She went to the windows again and stripped up the shades. The sunlight came bounding in.

"Superior intelligence never relinquishes the thing it wants." Memory, like a voice at her ear, brought back the words. The old lady had said it, on that day of the great discussion.

Miss Ayres put on her hat and went for a walk. She walked for an hour and she thought hard. Many persons believe they are thinking, when they are merely wishing. Inez Ayres did not wish—she thought; intensely, logically, with a momentum such as she had never before acquired.

*"Superior intelligence never relinquishes the thing it wants."*

The next day she did it. Full mistress of herself and of the situation, she called the number, exchanged a few words with the dominant voice and gave her invitation.

"For dinner—a week from Thursday?"

The man at the other end of the telephone was plainly surprised, but after the first inadvertent rising inflection, he concealed the fact. He guessed that in her own peculiar sphere, an invitation of any sort from Inez Caton Ayres was an honor not to be lightly treated, though in his world, which hinged on an entirely different plane, the honor would have to take its place with other interests, numerous and diverse.

His acquaintance with her being purely casual, the very unexpectedness of her invitation gave it flavor. Piqued curiosity, as much as any other impulse, prompted him to accept with pleasure.

Already, Inez felt, she had joined arteries with those huge, compelling forces that met in the arena where he lived and fought.

She had the table set on the prettiest of the screened balconies, the one leading off from the library, and it was exquisite in nasturtium shades. Beneath the filmy black of her gown, the same tints palpitated capriciously.

It was the most daringly handsome gown she had ever worn, yet supremely simple, with that simplicity which betokens a master designer. Until now she had kept it put away, for never before had she felt the courage requisite to sustain a role seemingly so foreign to her type.

Miss Ayres, usually averse to gems, had permitted herself one departure, for she had made a discovery that afternoon; she had seen in the

mirror how two drops of jewelled fire depending from her ears gave her face a glamour she had not dreamed was in her makeup. Somehow, these rubies seemed the spirit of the new daring, the symbol of all that had wakened in her during the past few weeks.

"Mr. Sanborn," announced Frieda.

Her mistress looked up, quietly. "Show him directly out here."

He was a man who sent his presence ahead of him, as it were, in electric waves; and when he crossed the threshold, brought with him an almost tangible host of witnesses to his personal power. Men felt this element in him as the gift of success, women as the gift of fascination.

If Miss Ayres had planned to arrest and astonish him, she certainly succeeded, for he looked at her—she could have sworn it—with-out at first recognizing who she was.

The last time he had seen her, she had been poring over some dusty documents in a publisher's office, looking rather fagged and dust-colored herself in a street suit of vague hue and spinster-like design. The few other times they had met had been equally inauspicious.

Now an entire stranger had bloomed on his horizon and he felt for a second the need of an introduction.

Though he got gracefully over the awkward instant, the shock of the surprise caused him to

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utter early in the evening the thing he would probably have reserved till later—the hazard that had been in his mind since he accepted her invitation.

"You look as if you might have any number of big business schemes hatching in that intrepid brain of yours."

It was a safe enough gamble, at any rate, for her activities as author and playwright made such a prospect not unlikely.

Miss Ayres looked at him.

In a child, unconscious charm is irresistible; in a woman, consciousness must put the crown upon her loveliness to make it felt. It was the first time in her life that this woman had ever looked into the eyes of any man with the full force of her personality and awareness of her own charm.

"Business schemes? What a curious idea!"

She dropped away from the subject there and let it drift, like so much fluff. As for the need of further explanation, that would have to take care of itself.

It did—admirably.

The second shock had proved even more effective, visibly, than the first. Robert Sanborn flushed, in the peculiar way he had—a flush that stained forehead, temples and eyelids, suffusing even the eyes.

From her poised place at table she saw it,

yet did not seem to see, hiding her triumph behind a smile naïve and ineffably gentle, the while she dispensed wafers and salad dressing.

It was her own salad dressing; she told him how she made it, by a recipe wheedled from some obliging chef when she was abroad last Spring.

Soon she had him launched upon his hobby—the recent tour he had made through Tripoli—and while he told of his adventures in the territory of the conquered Turk, she listened deftly with one brain section and with the other strove to analyze the secret of his charm.

Now she told herself it was his voice, mellow, deep and caressing, that really held the solution.

As for Robert Sanborn, he had not yet recovered from his surprise. Though outwardly he swung along in a fellowship which now seemed well established, beneath the surface his puzzled, questioning mind failed to adjust itself.

All through the evening he had the sensation of having touched upon strange shores, whose wholly unfamiliar turnings forbade sure cruising. The Miss Ayres he had known was a negative looking creature, with an air about her of not belonging to the red-corpusled human world. This Miss Ayres brought power to bear upon the present moment, fully animating her words, her body and her surroundings.

Later, as he sat smoking in the after quiet that fell upon them, wrapped by the comradely

dusk, lamp-fringed, he found himself staring, fascinated, upon the dark red drop of fire where all light appeared to focus—the ruby against her delicate cheek. It seemed to have leaped suddenly into being, a swift, embodied bit of cosmic fervor.

What a mysterious, beautiful thing it was and how it seemed to symbolize . . .

He could not get over it—the surprise of that whole experience. All through the succeeding week, it tantalized him, nagged at his consciousness. He had gone to see a blue-stocking and had found an houri. Did women blossom thus from grubs to butterflies overtimes? That miracle of nature had certainly been outdistanced here.

But Robert Sanborn was not a man to capitulate without due deliberation. Like most individuals highly esteemed of themselves and others, he prized too greatly what he had to give to offer it casually.

Unmistakably, she had flung him a challenge; he was not insensible to the flattery of it, from such a source. Sanborn had reached that stage of bachelordom which prides itself upon a thorough knowledge of women, but he had to admit that here was a woman it would be difficult for any man to fathom. Perhaps that was why she lured him.

He gave himself a week to think it over.

Miss Ayres was just telling herself that he was the most discourteous of men, unpardonably ignorant of social obligations, when one afternoon his flowers came. They were well chosen and lavish. She became all at once inordinately conscious of Frieda, and blushed as she directed her to put them in the tallest vases.

His attentions were many, after that. Often now he came to her balcony and sat in the lamp-fringed dusk. With infinite delicacy, she surrounded him with that atmosphere which made him feel it was good to be there. He enjoyed the novelty of an element which his friendships with other women did not contain.

He had been coming to see her for about four weeks, when one night he confessed: "Do you know, I used to think that you and all your craft were a narrow, fearfully anæmic lot, with not a thought beyond your books and your art. You have taught me my mistake."

"And I," she told him, "used to believe men like you were cold-blooded, tyrannical and remorseless where your own interests were concerned."

They both laughed.

"Well, and what have *you* learned?"

"Oh, it would take some time to tell," with charming evasion.

"Shall we not walk? Then perhaps you will tell me all about it."

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The evening was early yet and delightfully warm, with little fugitive breezes that brought a tang of woodland not far distant. She was wearing white to-night, a chaste, cool white, that gave her an unfamiliar personality, almost Grecian in its effect. Somehow, as they walked on, side by side, he found himself feeling abashed in the presence of this whiteness.

It was as if the first Miss Ayres, reserved, remote and of a different world, had come to take the place of the houri he had known, though with this difference: this one possessed all the allurements of the houri, but with a barrier that forbade approach.

"You are not tired?" he ventured, rather at a loss, after they had walked for some time without speaking.

"Oh, no. I'm used to walking. Don't you remember," smiling, "I told you about the championship?"

"I do remember now."

Still, he could find nothing to say to the new Miss Ayres.

"Do you know, I feel somewhat afraid of you to-night? I wasn't conscious of it, on your balcony, but since then . . ."

"Afraid!" She laughed merrily, a warm, human laugh.

He turned and looked. The creature at his side had humid eyes and blossoming lips. She

was no remote Diana, but a woman of flesh and blood, clothed in modern garb, her face aglow in the mingled witchery of moonrise and dusk still deeply ruddy.

At a turn in the road, a steep and ragged ascent confronted them, and he helped her up with the courteous arm one would offer to Inez Caton Ayres, releasing her the instant they had gained safe footing.

He thought he must have been mistaken about the swift, shy pressure of her hand as it left his shoulder—so faint, it was the merest impulse.

Now a bit of timberland offered an uneven though fragrant pathway, and from it they soon emerged into an open field where healthy meadow grass showed velvet gray in the moonlight. Startled by the sudden sense of space, both paused, lifting their faces skyward.

"How wonderful!" escaped her.

"Beautiful," the man assented.

Then the wideness seemed to settle down upon them like a mantle, enfolding them in palpitating silence. Moving beside her, watching her rapt expression, he felt his awe increase. The fearful quiet, like an insistent hammer, assailed his senses.

Did he mistake again, or did she lean toward him, ever so slightly, a motion fine as gauze, brushing him like wings? . . .

But her whiteness overpowered him; he was

still afraid to venture for he could not see her eyes, and whether or no the look in them was invitation.

"This thin scarf—is it enough for you?" He reached to replace a floating end of it.

Then the centuries taught her.

"Why, I . . . I didn't dream you could be like this!" he stammered, though he had hoped it, dared it, since that first night.

"Neither did I," she whispered back.

He caught her in a man's embrace, his kisses quick and countless, as of one who has waited long.

Breathless, she clung to him, not like flesh, a weight, but finely, as a flame; as if the spirit had found expression at last through flesh and made it a perfect mouthpiece for love. She was all love, that wrapped itself about him, entered his very veins, a subtle, ethereal essence.

"Oh," she kept crying, softly. "Is this it? Is this it?"

"Your lips!" he demanded.

"Tell me—is this what they feel—other women, all women? Is this——"

"Your throat . . . it is like white velvet. Oh, you don't know how delicious you are!"

"Wait . . . the weak women, those I've condemned"—her breath caught sobbingly—"is this what conquers them?"

"This is what conquers them."

She pulled away from him, pressing her hands to her eyes.

"Dear woman, precious woman," breathed the man, awed by her awe but not yet understanding. "Why, didn't you know? . . . Haven't you ever loved before?"

"I didn't know."

With the glad fury of a primitive man he held her. "Kiss me!" he commanded. "Of your own accord. I have kissed you—kiss me."

Forest and meadow were waking up. Everywhere, dusks and depths which had been inanimate and unspeaking, quivered and swelled and bloomed. Every bush had a million pulses, every tendril was a thread of fire.

"Why," she said as if it had that instant come to her, "it's this that lies at the root of all creation—it's this!"

"You've known it all your life, haven't you, dear woman?"

"Yes . . . but not that it was this."

Her head relaxed against his shoulder. "Oh, I wouldn't have missed it—I couldn't. It's worth having been born, just to know one moment of it."

Now she looked up and saw the sky and how the whole sweep of it palpitated with the miracle.

"Why," her voice was almost terrified, "it's back of everything—suns, planets, systems, . . . "

"Yes, yes," said the man.

"Millions and millions of worlds . . ." She gasped, covering her eyes, overpowered. "Think of it—right now at this instant our own globe, whirling through the ether, seething with humanity . . . this is the urge that speeds it . . . O, my God!"

She said it passionately, prayerfully, as one just facing the Creator.

"Precious woman, wonderful woman," whispered the man, for he was at last exalted by her exaltation and for a moment glimpsed love as she was feeling it.

Awestruck, he looked at her, almost afraid to speak lest he profane the moment. In all his experience he had never seen or known anything just like this. True, he had read of such scenes in novels, but with the assurance of his kind had scoffed, proud to be free of illusions.

Watching her, he scarcely knew how to analyze his feelings. Why he should be vaguely disconcerted, he could not tell.

Somehow, when they started on the homeward walk and he felt her helpless woman's clasp upon his arm over the rough places, he was more satisfied. After he left her, he felt again the stab of that swift misgiving, but on the morrow all he could think of was how alluring she had been.

He could not wait, but motored out to see her again that very evening.

"So soon?" she smiled, pretending reproach.

"I had to," his impetuosity shot forth, though Frieda was not yet out of hearing.

Some imp of a girl—Sanborn mentally denounced her as such—had full possession of the place, monopolizing time and conversation. It was Miss Ayres' young cousin, Una, spending the night with her and determined to share whatever diversions were in progress. Apparently, she had no least intention of vacating the premises.

Sanborn, making no effort to conceal his displeasure, strove in vain to freeze her out; Miss Ayres likewise. What a pert, ungovernable young thing she was, and how richly she deserved a spanking!

"Can't we get rid of her?" he demanded, more than once, with his eyes.

Inez, apparently, was unequal to the emergency.

He looked at his watch. "Miss Ayres and I are going for a spin in the car," he said, rising. Then, to her: "Will you put on your wraps?"

"Isn't it too late?" she tried to whisper.

"Not yet nine. Please come."

Inez, glowing, obeyed him. To think he had done it, to Una! Una, who was a beauty; Una, who was young; Una, whose fascination con-

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quered every man, no matter what his age or calling.

His love had made him blind.

"I couldn't wait," said the man; and took her in his arms. "O, woman, woman, I couldn't wait!"

And they were happy again, under the stars.

What a boy he was, Inez exulted, in the week that followed; what a mere boy, this great man of affairs whom once she had feared. It was her word that swayed him, absolutely; he would neglect business, friends, everything, to come to her.

Swept out of his accustomed attitude toward life, he was carried to her peaks of feeling and responded to her, even as she wished.

That for him it was a wholly unfamiliar height, from which he must soon drop back to breathing level, she could not know, nor did she even guess. She had no slightest realization how it was her own emotion that transfigured everything, her own interpretation she read into his every wish and word.

But the man was finding out. He began to say to himself, that of all women, she was certainly the most astonishing. That sooner or later she would descend from her ethereal ecstasy, he had not questioned; to find her constantly upon the mountain top nonplussed him more and more.

He had been used to women who frankly accepted love as an emotion of the senses. They knew all the stages of such love, from its rapturous beginnings down to the final boredom and the seeking of new loves.

This woman's concept of the grand passion was not all in keeping with any of these stages; her ardor knew no such lapses, seeming to draw its breath from inexhaustible springs, entirely out of his reach.

Plainly, that element in her emotion which at first had seemed to be so richly what he wanted, was something not at all to be comprehended.

Misgiving changed to certainty.

A business trip called him away for a week, and when he returned, a very avalanche of obligations submerged him for several days. It was good—he had to admit it—to get down to solid earth.

Meeting Miss Ayres by chance as his automobile waited near hers before a Boston business house, he flushed guiltily to realize how unpardonably remiss he had been.

"I just got back to-day," he lied. "May I come out to-night?"

But after that evening's call, it was another week before she heard from him, by telephone. The too casual tone of his voice should have warned her.

"I thought possibly you might let me come out this evening?"

"Why, yes, if you wish." Natural reserve kept her tone safely neutral.

"I'm fearfully tired. Work piled up while I was away; I can't seem to get rid of it."

"Oh!" she waited. "Perhaps—perhaps you'd better not try to come. Some other evening, when you're rested——"

But his ear caught the disappointment in her voice.

"Oh, I'll come. It will rest me. Look for me at eight."

To put the climax upon her discomfiture, Una was going to be there again. Of course, it would annoy him; his anticipated evening of relaxation would be spoiled at the start.

"Didn't Aunt Meredith expect you to return after dinner?" was the ruse she tried.

"Why, no!" Una's exceedingly blue eyes snapped. "Don't you remember, I'm to stay until father calls for me at ten o'clock?"

Inez remembered. Clearly, there was no help for it.

She looked to see Sanborn's face darken at sight of the girl occupying the very center of the scene and was relieved when he greeted her with pleasure, though her relief was tinged with surprise.

Doubtless, he was seeking to atone for his

rudeness to the young woman on that first occasion.

Unknown to Inez, the girl had spent one hour at the mirror after she had heard of Sanborn's expected visit. She had done something remarkable to her hair and eyes, and her whole person seemed charged with an electric something that compelled attention. It was as if the womanhood in her small young self resented that never-to-be-forgotten insult and was determined to be avenged.

Sanborn, negative to his surroundings, caught the spark at once. Merely amused at first, he listened idly to her chatter; then his amusement changed to something different.

Inez, watching the two, explained to herself that in his tired mood it was only natural he should trifle a few moments, to relax his brain. But time went by.

The clock chimed nine. Plainly, it was the woman, this time, who chafed and yearned and rebelled, while he dawdled away the precious moments with this mere child; this child to whom he had once been brutally rude in his efforts to be rid of her.

Inez saw now how cheap her own conquest had been. How little she had known of men!

Una's father did not call for her, after all. Her brother telephoned that he would come if she really felt the need of escort.

"Oh, Inez and Mr. Sanborn will bring me home. You needn't worry about me."

Sanborn was delighted. At Una's doorstep he lingered and chatted, while the woman turned away and would not see.

"What makes you so quiet?" he asked, on the way home.

"Nothing. I'm feeling quite well."

"Come!" he said, laughing, and threw a careless arm about her.

"Don't—please."

"Why not?"

"You know."

"I haven't the slightest idea."

Offended, he withdrew; and they walked on silently in the pulseless, miserable dark. He had left his light top coat upstairs on the balcony and went with her to get it.

"I don't mean to be unpleasant." She forced herself to say it, for he was going without a word, except his stiff good-night. "I—something has happened to break the magic, that is all. Nothing . . . nothing is the same."

He looked away, "I was tired to-night and wanted to be amused, rested."

"Ah, if you had only let me rest you! I wanted—"

"So that is it. I knew there was something you wished to criticize."

"I am not presuming to criticize you or re-

strict you. I only thought . . . it seemed to me when you had been away . . . your natural impulse would be——”

“You shouldn’t take a trifle like that so seriously.”

“Then you do know what it was.”

“Oh,” wearily, “I can guess.” His tone was that of a man whose brain has registered other episodes equally annoying.

“I—a woman who really loves wants to feel——”

“Yes?”

They were passing through the library from the balcony and now halted by one impulse, facing each other under the electric globe in the center of the room.

“Oh,” she continued, painfully, “it wasn’t the trifle itself, but what the trifle disclosed—the trend of your present feeling, your—indifference.”

The word, when it was out, seemed to explode in the air, leaving a fearful after quiet.

Then he spoke: “Men are constantly diverted in that way. It means nothing.”

“I can believe that,” she quickly replied. “I see that, perfectly. Don’t think me a nagging woman, or—oh, don’t you see, it wasn’t the mere fact of what you did . . . ”

They were both silent, while she looked away.  
“I—I simply thought I had found in you . . .

Why, don't you believe in an absorbing affection, that is all in all?"

"Oh, possibly." He flicked his hat carelessly with his glove. "Possibly. Doubtless when a man is in love and wants to marry, he has some such sense of loyalty."

Her eyes flashed upward and she stepped back. They stood staring at each other under the merciless light.

"Then you—don't love me?" her lips asked.

"I've never stopped to analyze my feeling."

Her blank eyes held him. "Then what—what did you mean—"

"Dear lady, why think one should 'mean' something? Men do not always mean. Sometimes they simply—drift."

No man of her own kind could have said it; she saw now how completely he was of a different species.

"But what—" some intrepid, incredulous spirit in her probed on as if it refused his verdict, seeking judgment at a higher court. "What was it all about? How—" this she seemed to ask, dazedly, not of him, but of herself—"how could everything have been so wonderful? . . . The enchantment, the splendor—"

Her eyes came back to his and some look in his face shocked her wide awake. "Why," as if she realized it for the first time, "I—I let you make love to me."

She stood aghast, recalling in her recovered mood all the force of the conventions. "What could you have thought?"

The man considered some seconds. He could hardly tell a woman of Inez Caton Ayres' calibre what had been in his mind at first. Indeed, he saw clearly now just how futile had been the whole experience. Oh, well, she was a spinster, a blue stocking—that was the long and the short of it; she had always been one, it was in her fibre and no pretended emotion could alter the fact.

"Frankly, I don't know just what I thought. You invited, and—"

"Ah!" She put up her hand, as if to ward it off. "I know. When the woman invites—"

Her eager mind rejected the present issue and leaped ahead to what apparently her hurt soul most craved to understand. "I knew that was it; I was sure that was it. When the woman invites! I understand. The order of nature is reversed—it doesn't give the man enough to fight for. That's why he tires—"

"I didn't mean that at all."

But she went on with her ruthless analysis. "He cannot value what is so easily won. I should have jealously guarded my emotions—"

She brushed a quick, unsteady hand across her forehead. "Coventry Patmore is right. You

remember—what is it he says? . . . ‘O, wasteful woman’——”

“Please,” begged Sanborn, “I dislike quotations.”

“Oh,” with a slight gasp. “I deserve it—all of it. I made the advances. I, the woman, took the lead. I have broken the ancient law—why should it spare me?”

The window shade had been lowered to a point where a strip of outdoors showed through, its gloom touched with the street’s vague lamp light. Her gaze fixed on this strip and seemed to lose itself.

“It isn’t as if I hadn’t always known. I’ve heard it from the cradle. Tradition, training, everything, hammered it into me.”

Just as he was telling himself that he had never before seen on a human face a look like that, it changed. Something spurted up in her eyes as from an unseen fount, just tapped; or had it been quelled until this instant?

Sanborn, astounded, saw it leap and spread until her whole face was suffused, the lips curved upward.

“Well!” The word was spoken softly, jubilantly. “It’s good to know.” She must have forgotten him. “I’ve done the thing I wanted to do.”

“What do you mean?”

She looked up, startled. "Why, what did I say?"

"The thing you wanted to do."

"Oh, yes," carelessly. She paused and her lips quieted, though the unruly light still danced in her eyes. "Yes. I had to learn from actual experience. Most persons do, don't they?"

"That isn't what you meant at first."

"Isn't it?"

Appalled, Sanborn saw again that jet of light leap and spread, irradiating her face.

"Why," he stammered, "you—you're laughing."

She sobered instantly. "Forgive me. I forgot myself. I—really, you must forgive me."

"I don't understand."

She turned quickly from him, her face hidden; when she revealed it, the regret of a courteous hostess replaced her former amusement. "I'm sorry. I didn't intend to tell you. I thought I could play it through to the end—it's all my fault. If I hadn't been such a poor actress . . ."

The man's face had whitened. "I don't in the least understand."

She challenged him now, with charming good nature. "Robert Sanborn, you are a man with a keen sense of humor and you must promise to laugh with me or I cannot tell you."

"My sense of humor must be convinced before I laugh."

"Oh, well." She made a pretty gesture of capitulation. "I suppose I might as well tell you—I've played the role as long as I can."

He waited. She seemed to find it difficult.

"Oh, it was a test—an experiment," she said briefly, at last. "Something—something I did for the sake of—for the sake of my work."

"Well?"

"Haven't you guessed it?"

Her smile exasperated him. "How in—pardon me. How should I guess it?"

"I should think," musingly, "you would have suspected long ago."

"You have not yet honored me with the facts."

"They are simple enough . . . Perhaps you know, my last novel was not a success. The critics said my characters were not real, my situations not convincing."

"Indeed."

She saw that his lips were drying, tightening.

"I began a new novel. In it, the woman proposes to the man. I wanted to know how a man would act if the woman took the initiative—not a man in a book, but an actual flesh and blood man."

"So it was a game, was it?" His eyes were narrowed to mere slits of grey. Here was some-

thing his man's intellect, master of the game, could understand.

"I didn't mean to tell you. I thought you would go away and need not know . . . "

"How does it happen," and his lip curled, "you chose me for your experiment? Why didn't you try your scheme on one of your own anæmic set?"

"That's just it—not any of them would do. I had to have an altogether different type of man. In fact, you were just the kind of a protagonist I needed."

His sneering composure had been forced, after all, for she saw his nostrils quiver with his quick, indrawn breath.

"Do you mean to tell me you deliberately planned this thing, lured me, made love to me, tricked and cheated me—all for your own selfish scheme, your diabolical literary work? Is that your feminine ideal of honor?"

"It sounds very wicked," reflectively, "when one puts it that way. But surely, you must have thought something."

"How could I?"

"You knew we were strangers to each other—almost."

"Yes."

"You knew I was a writer of novels."

"Certainly."

"What did you think, when I suddenly asked

you, without apparent reason or excuse, to dine with me?"

She saw that sink in. He would not answer, but stood there, hat and gloves held rigidly, nor took his eyes from her face.

He saw it now, inevitably. The woman before him was telling the truth; the strange, gay look in her face was not bravado, the forced cheerfulness of a woman determined to hide her hurt. She had deceived him for her own ends and with consummate cleverness played her part; it was all focused there, visibly, in her smiling eyes.

To lightly tire of a woman and tell her so is one thing; to find oneself made sport of, the dupe of that same woman, who, after all, has never cared a fig, is quite a different matter.

The look on his face, as it grew, was frightful—so poignant is human egotism, outraged. Pride was strong in him, but the hurt to his man's conceit was stronger. In spite of him, it cried aloud.

"Then all of it was shammed! You didn't"—the calamity struck him fully now—"you didn't even care for me, as you pretended?"

She dropped her eyes. "I know it is hard to forgive."

"Good God!" The voice was nearer that of the old Robert Sanborn than it had been since their first raptures.

One almost pitied him.

"Oh, it wasn't so difficult," she granted, kindly. "You were a very interesting character, you know."

But he saw only the mirthful condescension in her eyes and how her lips twitched with the effort to sober them.

"It isn't possible! I won't believe it . . . That first night, in the forest, when you looked at the sky and cried out all those wonderful things——"

She turned abruptly from him. "Don't!" The word was out.

He looked up.

"I—I really am ashamed of that," she had the conscience to confess.

"You didn't feel it, then!" He stood aghast. "Even that sacred fervor, almost religious—you feigned it all. You didn't feel any of it, you——"

"But you didn't love me," she reminded him. "Why should you care?"

"I could have loved you—I did love you——"

"Ah!" Her head lifted.

"There were times—there was one time, there, when I was sure of it." Now it all swept back to him. "God! You were magnificent. I never saw anything like it. I never knew a woman capable of such splendid emotion."

"Now indeed you have convinced me."

"What do you mean?"

The mirth in her eyes increased. "You can't

help it, you men. It's your inheritance. You're not to be censured for it. Besides—it is the law."

She held out a gallant hand. "Come, Robert Sanborn! You are an expert at the game and can laugh when you are beaten. No one is hurt, both of us heart whole, so we are quits. Surely, we may part friends?"

But he would not see the hand extended. A swift, dark red dyed cheekbones, forehead and eyelids. "You're all alike, you women—hypocrites, actresses, not one of you capable of genuine feeling. You're all alike."

Turning abruptly, he left her. Once, just as he reached the outer door, he looked back to where she stood under the electric light in the center of the room.

She was still smiling.

She had not stirred from her position when, some moments later, Frieda came down the stairs from the upper chambers. The German woman stopped short at sight of her mistress' face.

"You may pack up the veranda things, Frieda, and turn out the lights. I shall retire now." Her voice, surely, was cool and level enough.

"Yes, Fraulein."

Frieda watched the tall figure pass on into the library, straight and poised, its long draperies trailing after. Sensitive to every change, she felt the unusual element that charged the atmosphere, as if a storm had passed that way. From her

discreet position she watched, without seeming to watch.

Miss Ayres went to the window and looked out upon the moon-flooded space. She stood an instant, then moved to the mantel, her back toward the veranda.

Suddenly the shoulders bent, the head went down . . .

Frieda, looking on, dropped with a crash the chair she held.

Miss Ayres raised her head composedly and turned, the light full in her face. That bright, swimming look about her eyes was laughter!

Her shoulders were erect, her tread firm and even, as she mounted the stairway to her room.

Frieda, still troubled, went up five minutes later. Was it a trick of the moon, or did a white figure, face downward, lie prone upon the couch in her mistress' room?

The loyal woman, keenly solicitous, cast a backward glance as she went up the higher flight to her own quarters.

Hush! What was that?

She leaned over the bannisters, listening . . .

No, that was imagination, too.

Frieda, still listening, got ready for bed. But she could not sleep. She kept thinking of a white figure lying prone upon the couch and of that strange, stifled sound.

Softly, she stole downstairs and looked again. Her mistress' door was closed.





## **WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH MOTHER?**

**"There is an inmost centre in us all  
Where truth abides in fullness."**



## WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH MOTHER?

### I

**A**S Mrs. Trask got off at the little suburban station and looked about her, she felt as lonely as a telegraph pole out in a windy space. The feeling that swept her had the same sound to her spirit as the winter plaint of the wires, when, in childhood, she had stood close with her ear against the desolate hum.

Although she had not announced her coming and expected no one to meet her, she could not help the blank sensation natural to the traveler when there is no welcoming face. It was too early yet for liverymen, but Mrs. Trask did not mind that, for the habit of economy was an established thing in her brain, and if a dozen had pressed their services, she would have had the courage to wave them away.

She attacked the walk with the air of a woman accustomed to doing the uncomfortable thing, her firm tread crushing the crisp March ice that lined the ruts in the road. The heat of the exercise was good, and a clean red color soon mottled her cheeks. By the time she had gone

four blocks, the sob of the telegraph wires had changed to a song within her; a song that set her own network of veins and nerves humming with pleased anticipation.

She was nearing a hearthfire; she was nearing a welcome; soon a table would be set for her where she would sit cheerily and talk with her own.

At last, the street and the corner where Ada lived! Mrs. Trask mounted the steps of the neat two-family dwelling and put down her rather heavy traveling bag with a sigh of relief. As yet there were no signs of life to be seen about the place, except a morning paper thrown upon the door sill, where it awaited a claimant.

Something was wrong with the front bell, so Mrs. Trask went around to the side, where milk bottles stood, cold-white, with cream showing yellow at the top.

She had to ring repeatedly before a man's voice called down the speaking tube: "What in thunder do you mean by disturbing us all at this hour? Didn't I tell you we'd come and get the milk when—oh, I beg your pardon. Who is this, please?"

The visitor laughed in secret enjoyment. "Do you mean to say you can't guess, Harry Page?"

"I declare—you, mother! Well, of all things—if you'd only told us—it's such a shock—such a surprise, I mean. Ada'll be so astonished—I

mean," with a nervous laugh, "so awfully glad. Come on up, as quick as you can. It's cold as blazes!"

Ada, in a violet kimono, was just emerging sleepily from the hall when Mrs. Trask entered. She stood regarding the newcomer for one second with a perfectly blank expression; then, waking up, made a rush at the waiting figure, hugging and kissing with an emphasis that compensated for her seeming lack of welcome.

"Why, mother! To think of it. How perfectly dear of you to surprise us. Why, we hadn't the least idea—we thought you were at Jane's, you know, for a month or so. I mean—"

"I was at Jane's; they did expect me to stay. But the most unusual thing happened—some friends of theirs came down upon them without a word of warning, and with their trunks and all, prepared to stay. And what could I do? Of course poor Jane was taxed to the utmost and I just said I'd go right away. I thought you and Harry could take me for a while—"

"Well, I should think so! Take you? Why, you're only too welcome to stay and visit us, dear, just as long as you . . . Think how dreadful of Jane's friends to come and put you out. How did she explain it? I never heard of anything quite so . . . Harry, get on your coat, dear, and hurry over to Schloss's for some lamb chops. Get the dainty little kind and ask

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the butcher to French them for you. And get some grape fruit, too. Here, mother—come up close to the radiator and get warm."

But through all their outer efforts, their bustling and eagerness, the mother detected the presence of nervous tension, of distress that was most acute. Once, when Ada and Harry met in the doorway, she saw them exchange a look charged with peculiar meaning.

She troubled over it but a moment, then went straight out into the kitchen. "Now, children, if it isn't perfectly convenient for you to have me, I want you to say so out and out. You know I understand——"

"Why, mother, you darling! What put such an idea into your head? As if it wouldn't always be perfectly splendid to have you with us. Harry, did you ever hear of such a thing?" Ada's eyes flashed loving indignation and her cheeks burned loyally scarlet.

At breakfast, the guest had a melting sense of assurance, for her son-in-law was more than attentive and Ada could not do too much for her comfort. All three chatted and laughed in a glow of enjoyment and comradeship.

"I declare, Ada, you're as luxurious as can be in your new apartment—oh, I forgot! I'm thinking of sister Agatha in New York and what she calls apartment. You don't call it that here in New England, do you?"

"Not here in the suburb. Besides——"

"Ours is just plain tenement, mother. Don't try to call it anything else." Harry's eyes twinkled as he said it.

"Now mother, don't mind one thing he tells you. He is forever teasing me by calling this a tenement."

"Isn't the coffee-urn a peach?" from the proud young husband.

"And, mother, did you notice our new hall rug?"

But when husband and wife were bidding each other good-bye at the outer door, the visitor distinctly heard their low pitched voices in agitated discussion. When Ada returned to the dining room, her eyes showed tearfully red, though they flashed into forced cheerfulness the moment they met her mother's glance.

It was when Harry returned that evening that Mrs. Trask really heard enough to justify her fears. "Ada," he asked his young wife, hurriedly, "did you tell her?"

"No, Harry, I couldn't. If you want to tell her yourself, all right. But I simply can't. We'll have to find room for them both, somehow."

"Children!" They both turned, guiltily, to see her standing in the doorway. Never, Ada thought, had her mother looked so sweet, so gentle, yet so majestic; a woman of presence, with an air of dignity that compelled attention.

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"Children, why didn't you tell me? You expect someone else. You know I wouldn't for the world interfere with one plan of yours——"

The husband's face went crimson and he began to stammer, while the wife gave way to tears.

"We didn't want you to know it, mother, but Harry's own mother is coming to-morrow for a month. She wrote just a day or so ago—but you needn't go, dear. You mustn't go. There's plenty of room—indeed there is!"

She interrupted, smiling on them with perfect understanding. "You know mother better than that, don't you, Ada? And you, Harry—what were you thinking of, my boy, not to tell me? I can go to Ella's just as well as not. I'll go to-morrow."

"Oh, mother, if you only knew——"

"I do know, Ada. Don't you suppose I see that it's neither your fault, nor Harry's?"

## II

She felt more secure in going to Ella's than she would in risking the hospitality of her other remaining children, at short notice. Whatever inconvenience she might cause her oldest daughter was always balanced by the fact that she could make herself of distinct use to her in her home.

Ella lived more comfortably than the others

and was able to afford a maid, but in spite of assistance, her responsibilities were invariably great. The care of three little children was in itself sufficient to tax her resources, and in addition to this, she permitted herself the luxury of outside interests.

"Oh, mother, mother!" was her overjoyed greeting. "I'm so glad you've come. You're an angel of mercy just in the nick of time. Deborah's sick—she's gone off to the hospital—so I've everything to do. Imagine it! And all my spring sewing on hand, to say nothing of my club and church work. Well, you've come in time to save me from collapse."

Mrs. Trask needed no further invitation to enlist as savior of the situation. Even while her daughter was explaining, she rolled up her sleeves and made straight for the pantry. Never was she happier than when, at the mixing bowl, she brought her genius to bear in concocting tempting viands. Cooking to her was a science, an art, a beloved profession, into which she could put her best self. As the chemist loves his laboratory, she loved her kitchen and her pantry.

By night time, every member of the household was singing her praises and she went to bed with the glowing consciousness that she was a necessary factor in the happiness of others. So beautiful was this realization that early morning found her up and hastening about her tasks,

radiant, energetic, stimulated as never before to prove her usefulness.

Before the day was over, however, she began to realize the magnitude of the responsibility she had shouldered with such light-hearted willingness. Ella was nothing, if not an extremist, and now that her mother was present to share the burden, she seemed urged to unusual efforts at domestic achievement.

Mrs. Trask found herself caught in a very whirlpool of activities, swept on from day to day by the force of a current she was powerless to resist. Even with the seamstress daily at the machine, the sewing alone, as Ella planned it, was a big undertaking. The seamstress, too, made an extra plate at table; indeed, there were many extra plates at table in the days to follow. Proud of her mother's culinary accomplishment, Ella took this opportunity to cancel many a luncheon and dinner debt, with the result that Mrs. Trask was kept in a fever of effort to live up to her reputation.

The mother had hoped to draw a free breath in the evenings, but here she was disappointed, for the children and their needs were omnipresent then, the twins scrambling over her, pleading for bedtime stories and little Bennie, from his crib, demanding his full share of attention.

When Mrs. Trask's own hour for retiring

came, she was too exhausted to do anything but drop thankfully to sleep. Being a woman accustomed to nourishing her mind as well as her body, she missed keenly the hour she usually set aside for reading. She began to feel the heaviness and languor that come with mental malnutrition.

To this day, the month stands out in her memory as one of the hardest she ever knew; for it was a full month that passed before she could believe it possible. Then Deborah came back from the hospital, ready to take up her work again.

Mrs. Trask sat down and breathed a sigh of ardent satisfaction. "Won't it be lovely," she remarked to her daughter, "for us both to luxuriate in a few days of rest? You need it, Ella; really, dear, you must let go completely for a while."

The daughter's reply was vague and absent. There was a troubled look in her eyes.

"What is it, Ella? Tell me, child. You mustn't keep anything from me."

"Well, mother—you won't think it's inhospitable of me, dear, will you? But I just don't see how I can avoid it. I didn't tell you at first for fear it would spoil your visit—but—but I promised to take two of the delegates to our convention next week. You see, I had already promised, and I can't possibly go back on it now—"

"I see, dear—no, don't say another word. No, dear, I wouldn't think of staying; it wouldn't be fair. I understand; it's all right."

But as she thought it over in her room that night, the mother was utterly at a loss. There was Tom, her only living son. Tom would be glad enough to have her come, were it not for Mabel, his very young and sensitive wife, who, without grounds, had conceived a dislike of her that made a visit to his home impossible.

Mabel, whose antipathy to mothers-in-law, rooted in tradition and hearsay, caused her to look askance upon the slightest interest Mrs. Trask betrayed in her welfare, had referred to her as a "meddler" merely because she had dared to remain in her son's home for two innocent weeks. During that time, Tom's mother, sorely pressed and anxious to keep the peace, had finally shrunk into such a state of non-resistance that even Tom, usually so loving and considerate, had irritably exclaimed: "For goodness sake, mother, haven't you an opinion of your own? Do hold your head up. Don't cringe as if Mabel were a tyrant."

No, she could not go to Tom's.

Then that left the only refuge, Millie; her youngest, her "pet," the others called her. But at thought of going to her, the mother's heart contracted with a peculiar pain—not because of Millie, but because of Millie's husband.

### III

She had been at the house a week and as yet there was no loosening of the tension. Millie herself was all love, all solicitude and consideration, which only had the effect of throwing Grant's strange behavior into bold relief.

The most smarting realization came at meal-time. During the day, when Grant was away, Mrs. Trask could find some compensation in the glow of her daughter's genuine companionship. But each time she struggled through the ordeal of that situation at table, she told herself, vehemently, that she would not do it again.

"Grant, dear, won't you help mother to gravy?"

He did it with the strictest politeness, yet without uttering a word. Then, anticipating his mother-in-law's next need, he provided her promptly, without any suggestion from Millie. But his face wore an expression of utter stolidity.

"I'm glad you like the fern, mother—I won it at the card club. And I won that piece of Venetian, too."

"You always were clever at cards, Millie. Do you entertain often?"

"Pretty often—Grant likes to have me"; this with a look at him which really called for some

rejoinder. But the response was not forthcoming.

Millie, in sudden desperation, determined to compel him.

"Grant, isn't it true, dear? Why don't you back me up in something?" Her laugh was more nervous than gay.

"I hardly think my word is necessary." The remark cleft the air with the precision of steel.

Millie flushed and bit her lip, while something flashed menacingly in her eyes. But her husband apparently saw nothing except the roast veal upon his plate.

Conversation crumpled in a heap under the weight of the silence that descended then; a silence that continued absolute throughout the remainder of the meal. So oppressive was it that Mrs. Trask began to feel her very breathing a painful and embarrassing thing.

She was a woman of supreme control, else she could not have sat through it without a protest. After dessert was served, however, and her son-in-law prepared to linger over his coffee and cigar, she quietly arose and excused herself.

The two at table heard her door close softly at the far end of the hall; then Millie turned upon her husband.

"Grant, this has gone too far. We might as well have it out. What do you mean by insulting mother every time she comes here?"

"Now, Millie, let's not have a scene. You know as well as I the situation in its entirety, so please, I beg of you, let me enjoy my after dinner smoke in peace."

"Peace! Do you suppose there can be any peace in a house where the wife's mother is treated as mine is treated? I tell you, Grant, we've got to have an understanding."

"Very well, if you insist. The fact of the matter is, Millie, that I consider I've done my full share toward the problem of your mother. I've done far more than any of the other sons-in-law. The time has come for the others to take a hand. They've shirked long enough."

"Why, Grant Marvin!" In her excitement, Millie rose to her feet. "You speak as if you were *free* to drop the matter upon others. Do you mean to say you've forgotten the agreement?"

He frowned at that and did not reply.

"Do you mean to say," his wife persisted, "that you've forgotten, Grant? Oh, I do love justice so and it hurts me to think my own husband—"

"There, there, Millie!" he broke in, testily. "Let's do away with the preachment and discuss plain facts."

"I'm only too anxious to do it." Millie sat down. "The plain fact, then, Grant Marvin, is this: that you and I wouldn't have this cosey

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furnished apartment to-day if it hadn't been for mother. You know well enough that the *reason* she hasn't a home of her own to-day is because she sold it, for us——”

“Hold on—not so fast. I wonder if it is possible for a woman not to exaggerate? She didn't sell it for us, Millie. She——”

“I'm coming to that, if you'll give me time. The agreement was that we should all share alike in what was purchased from that money. What was purchased with it, Grant? All these things—every bit of this furniture, which we couldn't possibly have had without mother's sacrifice.”

“Sacrifice! She did it with the idea of getting her share, Millie. It was a plain enough business proposition.”

“All the better for my argument, Grant. Do you mean to say that you, a man of integrity, are going back on that 'plain business proposition?' The agreement was that mother, in return for selling her lovely home——”

“Now, Millie! It was a little old country shack —cottage, I beg your pardon. But it wasn't worth——”

“It was worth enough to *furnish entirely our new home*. And the agreement, Grant, if you'll allow me to state it, was that mother should have her home with us in return. After father died,

she was all alone and it was only fair that she should be with some of her family."

"Well, hasn't she had her home with us for the last four years?"

"No! That's just what I'm furious about. She's had her headquarters here, if you like. But you know well enough that your treatment of her has driven her to seek refuge from place to place—first one home and then another. She hasn't felt sure of one place that she could actually call her own."

"But for heaven's sake, Millie, don't you expect a man to have any private life of his own? I didn't suppose it meant that you and I were never to have our own life together. You wouldn't find one man in a million who'd be willing to put up with the constant presence of a third party, especially when the party in question isn't pleasant."

"Isn't pleasant!" incredulously. "Why, Grant, if you can find any mother anywhere who is kinder, sweeter, less interfering than my mother—"

"It isn't that, Millie. It isn't anything she says or does, it's simply that I don't like her. People can't account for their personal likes and dislikes."

"And you'd let this unaccountable dislike of yours prevent you from doing the square thing by mother—"

"I'll do anything except stand for her presence here in the house forever. Now, here's a proposition that I consider fair enough. Let your mother take what furniture she thinks is hers by the agreement and go away and board independently. I'm willing to contribute my share every month to her board if the rest of the family will do their part. But, of course, I'm not willing to stand it alone. If you can get the others to make up the rest of the amount, all right . . . For the Lord's sake, Millie, what are you crying about? If that isn't a fair proposition——"

"Oh, it's fair enough, I suppose. But—poor mother—off by herself, with none of her own family to really make a home for her——"

Sobs cut her short.

"Oh, well, it's the sensible thing to do, take my word for it. She'll think so, too. Cheer up, girlie—don't be sentimental over it. People can't afford to be, in a world like this."

Millie dried her eyes. "I'll write to the girls to-night, and to Tom. Poor boy, his salary is small, you know; we can't expect him to give much. But Ella's husband, surely, can afford to help substantially . . . Dear me, isn't it dreadful! . . . soliciting contributions for one's own —one's own mother. O, Grant, do try to be nice to her till we can arrange it as—as you say."

"I'll do my best." It was not difficult to promise, now.

Indeed, so successfully did he keep his word, that Millie's mother began to think he must have conquered his former antagonism, while Millie herself suffered even more than before. The other situation, at least had been honest; this, for all its outward peace, had guilt at the core. It was the Judas kiss of conspiracy.

It was two weeks later that the daughter, at breakfast, received a letter which plunged her into a mood of deepest despondency. For the first time in their existence together, Millie refused to take her mother into her confidence, offering as an excuse that she "didn't wish to trouble her with every trifling annoyance."

Mrs. Trask, however, felt certain it was no "trifling annoyance" that had swept Millie so quickly into an abyss of gloom. The daughter was so anxious to conceal her letter that she crushed it into her apron pocket among a miscellaneous assortment of darning materials. Later, when a caller came, the apron was thrust upon a closet shelf.

The mother, searching one afternoon in the sewing bag, came across a crumpled roll of paper. She was about to toss it into the waste basket, when she rebuked herself for carelessness and began to smooth it out to see if the writing on it was of any value.

A startling question revealed itself:  
*"What shall we do with mother?"*

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Wonderingly, she smoothed the rest of the page. The handwriting was Ella's and the ink bright as if recently used.

"I'm simply desperate over it since your letter, Millie. It's the one question that will always be with us and no amount of discussion can solve it. I know it's dreadful to say it, but Stephen can't contribute a penny. I'm helpless as an infant, for it's my husband, not I, who earns the money and decides how it shall be spent. Oh, dear, if I could only earn something myself—but, you see, I can't and there it goes."

"Stephen says mother's support is not his affair—that he didn't marry my family when he married me. And besides, he thinks it just about as much as one man can shoulder to care for a wife and three children in times like these. He says he thinks the others ought to manage it, for they have no children to provide for. We've had no end of quarrels over it —"

Here the page ended, abruptly torn.

The mother leaned her head against the chair back and closed her eyes. After awhile, she smoothed another page:

"Stephen blames Grant for not standing up to his bargain and he says all the responsibility rests with him, that he himself ought to provide for mother elsewhere if he cannot stand to have her in the house. Mother could have a small

room in some boarding house, it wouldn't cost so much."

Mrs. Trask turned the sheet, but it was blank on the other side. One sheet was missing, then. But it did not seem to matter. Nothing mattered . . .

When she looked up again, dusk had fallen. She was sitting with the two pages crumpled in her hand, as they were at first, a mere shapeless lump. Had she been sleeping, after all?

No . . . one end, turned down, showed that same vivid question: "What shall we do with mother?"

She roused herself, and standing rather unsteadily, put on her hat and coat. Her only thought was to get away where she could think alone.

Millie was in the kitchen preparing dinner and the mother tiptoed through the hall without disturbing her and let herself out of the front door.

How stupendously quiet it was! As if the whole world had suddenly been caught and muffled by invisible powers. She began to walk, slowly at first, then more and more rapidly, moving in a numbness hushed as velvet, all enveloping, like fog.

How strange it would be to live always in an echoless, noiseless universe like this . . .

Across a dream landscape she saw the lights of cars and motors occasionally flash and people

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walking; dream people, all of them, wrapped by the same soft unreality that stifled her.

But even as the prism holds in its crystal whiteness every degree of crimson and purple passion, so she felt now that her hushed white numbness held all degrees of suffering, frozen, stunned.

She walked on, scarcely knowing why she walked; not conscious of where she was going, not caring. Once she paused and leaned against a parapet in the glare of an arc light, and a woman stopped and spoke to her. "Isn't there something I can do?" Her voice was anxious, kind.

"No," answered the mother, vaguely. "There is nothing." She put up her hand and felt the tears on her cheek; they were dream tears—they belonged to the strange silence.

After awhile it came to her dimly that she ought to be at home at this hour—it was past dinner time and Millie would be worried about her. She had gone a long, long distance from home.

Retracing her steps, she began to realize the chill of the air. It was one of those raw evenings in late April, when winter seems to have returned to nip the hopes of spring. What was there haunting, familiar, about the very touch of this keen air—the scent of it? A something

that brought up deep forgotten memories . . . a crisis.

Now it bore down upon her . . . On just such a night, years ago—so far away, and yet so close to her it seemed but yesterday!—she had braced her soul and her body to face the Terror. She had gone down into the pit, with a prayer and vehement hope that she might live, if only to look once upon the face of her first born.

Six times, in the succeeding years, she had faced that same Terror; she had groped in a blackness pierced with unspeakable pain. One thing she had said to herself over and over, for it made her feel as soldiers feel: "It's for my country; it's to bring men and women into the world."

That had helped; and she had come out into the light at last, to feel the little warm, whimpering creature there against her—do mothers ever forget?

Memories were crowding thick. That week of Ella's desperate illness, when she had fought as only a mother can fight, defying the nurses and the doctor, crying out that they were wrong —her baby *could not die!* And she had reached, with her passionate cry, and brought her back, out of the very valley of the shadow . . .

She had sat up, night after night, refusing food, ignoring sleep, forgetting that anything

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existed save this one mighty thing that she must do. And the child grew well and strong—

The child whose letter she had read to-day: "Mother can have a small room in some boarding house—it won't cost much."

"But it isn't Ella's fault." The mother instinct in her rushed to the front even now, seeking to protect its own. "It isn't any of the children's fault."

Yet whose fault was it? How had it come about? How could it be that she, who had given all and asked nothing, for love's sake, for humanity's sake, should find herself now homeless; a subject of contention among her children; a convenience to be used and tossed aside; an obstacle to their happiness?

It was conditions that had spoken—not any individual; conditions far beyond the control of her children or herself. No single individual could be to blame. Some lack in society, some flaw in the national concept of the ripened mother's place, must be responsible that she, at this stage of her life, should be cast aside. Now, at the very time she was most fitted to enjoy and achieve; now, when her hardest lessons were learned, her capacity for usefulness larger than ever.

How could it be that she was no longer of any use? That was what stung; for that was what it

meant, all of it. She could not evade it—her children did not need her now.

And could she yield without a protest—she, an aspiring, energetic human being? Could she consent to be shelved, cast among the helpless, whose work was done—the old, the feeble, the patient who sit down in quietness to await the end?

“No!” The new creature that was waking to life within her shouted it with fury. “No!”

In some lives, character change is a slow process, the growth of patient years. In others, transformation may come in an hour. It was so with Mrs. Trask. The shock of this supreme disaster had done for her what usually results only through plodding processes of evolution.

From a submissive weakling who had through all her life effaced her God-given self, she changed to a creature of strength and purpose, resolved to claim her own.

“No! I’m not old. I’m not feeble. I’m not worn out. Why,” with a thrilling rush of realization, “it’s only part of my life that’s been lived; a whole new life is just ahead—the best of it’s before me!”

Her brain expanded with kindled thoughts, she felt the tide of the new courage already in her veins. In the days before her marriage, what dreams she had dreamed of big achievement, of

usefulness to humanity at large. What castles she had built . . .

Then love had called and she had answered, believing at last that there could be no larger mission.

What if those dreams should now be realized, what if life still held for her something like the first call?

By the time she had reached her daughter's house, she knew, in the strangely awakened new depths of her, that she need never again be a pensioner upon anyone. Independence! The right to pursue her own happiness and her own work —she could claim it, even now; and she would. What had she been thinking of, not to have seen it long ago?

#### IV

It was beginning life all over again. Something wonderful had happened; as if, with her buoyant, new attitude of mind, the actual years had rolled off her shoulders, leaving her intrepid, young.

Agatha had remarked it at once. Mrs. Trask had gone straight to New York, where this only sister lived, and had told her the plan in her brain. Until now, she had never felt free to visit here, for Agatha, a teacher with many responsibilities, could not keep house and Mrs. Trask hesitated

to increase a board bill which was already large enough.

Now, however, with her new purpose of self maintenance, she was willing to accept the temporary shelter of her sister's boarding place, until her plans could mature.

"It's really a great idea," Agatha permitted herself to state, when she had heard the proposition. And whenever this staid and skeptical critic was sufficiently convinced to render such a verdict, one might be justified in going ahead.

There were four other teachers who at once grasped the idea with fervent thankfulness. Each was living in a stuffy, box-like apartment house, where daylight was at a premium, and space a luxury wildly out of reach. Each took her meals outside in irregular fashion; sometimes at a little tea room where the rush and confusion rarely gave opportunity for wholesome enjoyment; sometimes at dairy lunch rooms, again at some neighborhood restaurant where crowds made a homelike atmosphere impossible.

Before many days had passed, new candidates appeared, begging to be admitted to the co-operative scheme, with the result that a much larger and better apartment was selected than the promoters had at first dreamed they could afford.

It was, from the first, a home. Mrs. Trask intended that it should be and her dynamic pur-

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pose made itself felt in every department. Tired, dyspeptic teachers whose faces had grown strained and colorless in the struggle to adjust themselves to living that was not living, relaxed and blossomed into happy human beings in the sunshine of their new environment. Thin, nervous bachelor maids, pale from lack of proper nutrition, grew plump and smiling under the effects of delicious cookery and motherly attention combined. No single person in the house failed to brace up and turn a cheery face to the world.

Never in her happiest days had Mrs. Trask experienced greater delight in the work she loved. Imagination, enthusiasm, creative ability—these she lavished on the profession that was becoming dearer to her with every day. She had not known that there could be such exhilaration, such triumph, in putting the actual substance of one's self into the work at hand.

Added to this was the satisfaction of being able to earn money. In her early womanhood, as a school teacher, she had known something of this satisfaction. But the joy of that time paled by comparison with this new knowledge—that even after her life work was supposed to be over, she could develop the money earning gift, could support herself in dignity and comfort.

She was able to dress better than at any previous time since the days of bridal finery, spend-

ing care and thought on her appearance as she did upon her work. Now that her time was her own, she felt justified in this, and was able to afford accessories she had never dared to think of in the days when every thought was to sacrifice for the children's sake.

"You look anything but a working house-keeper," Agatha informed her, laughingly. That was the title she had bestowed upon her sister when the enterprise was launched.

The teachers always protested when the subject came up. "We refuse to label you," they declared. "Talent like yours is too big to label."

It was Miss Fergusen, the domestic science assistant, who proudly invited to dinner one day the college superintendent of that department.

"We think the layman has so much to learn," she remarked. "What do you think of this, for a woman who never studied domestic science?"

The college expert had to yield. "This isn't mere ability," she granted. "It's genius; genius too marked to be hidden under a bushel very long."

As she was leaving, she asked for an interview with Mrs. Trask.

"This is the sort of workmanship we need among us," she said, at once. "We need teachers like you. Why don't you take it up at college seriously, with that end in view?"

Mrs. Trask managed her studies in the even-

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ings, for her work in the house was over then. New regions in her brain were opening up, she was making a larger and larger consciousness. To her astonishment, it was easier for her to study now than at any previous time; her mind was fuller, richer, more certain of itself.

The summer term was over and she was well into the autumn work before she realized it. Winter passed, spring advanced, fresh and keen with new ambitions, new hopes and ideas.

"Ah, . . ." her soul caught the message fully . . . "that's it—the secret. It's not years, it's lack of incentive, that makes life worthless and women old."

### V

"Think of it!" cried Ella, striving to keep possession of the Sunday paper which all the family were clamoring to read. "Just think—our own mother coming into such prominence—a whole interview with her, and her picture and all sorts of splendid things about her work. It seems like an 'Arabian Nights' story up to date. I can't believe it yet!"

Grant and Millie, visiting for the week end, had been first to secure the paper at the ecstatic shriek of little Bennie, "G'anma's picture—look! Look!"

Every member of the group now jostled and

struggled for a view. Millie lifted a flushed and joyously tearful face. "I always knew mother had it in her," she triumphed. "I always knew she was a genius. And to think of her going at it all alone, never letting us know, with no encouragement from anyone . . ." Her voice caught in a sob.

She dared not look at Grant, for she felt in a scorching wave the feelings that swept him. Ella's husband had not yet recovered from his daze.

When he did emerge, he had an inspiration. "I'll tell you what we'll do! When mother lectures here, we'll all go in a body and give her a rousing welcome."

Ella couldn't help smiling at that. "If you really think she needs our applause! I venture to say she has enough praise from the outside world not to miss what her own have failed to give."

So Ella, too, was waking up! Millie flashed a swift look at her. "Mother isn't like that," she answered, very softly. "Success hasn't made her forget—us."

"I know what we really ought to do, all of us," Ella confessed, while her cheeks flooded with color. "We ought to write her a joint letter and tell her just what we think of her, and of—ourselves. For my part, I'm not ashamed to admit what I think of myself."

Millie had been right. Often, in her hours

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of greatest accomplishment, the mother thought with pain of the night when realization had taken from her the sweetest dream of all.

And her heart ached for the mothers who had suffered as she had suffered, yet had not found the way out; helpless, many of them, unable to go forth and claim their independence as she had done. What could become of them?

She was thinking of these mothers and of her own fate, when one morning the postman handed her a letter addressed in Ella's hand. It was such a plump letter and had such a nameless atmosphere about it, that Mrs. Trask's hands trembled as she broke the seal.

And when she read it and the names signed at the end, her head went down on her arms and the flood broke.

"Forgive!" she cried, as she kissed the letter again and again. "As if there's anything to forgive!"

For after all, she was first a woman and a mother; and dearer than all else to her were the children she had borne.

## **THE PRICE OF UNDERSTANDING**

“Oh, not alone when life flows still, do truth  
And power emerge, but also when strange chance  
Ruffles its current . . .  
Peril, deep joy, or woe.”

—

—

## THE PRICE OF UNDERSTANDING

**W**HEN Carrol Richardson first noticed in her husband a flash of the masculine trait she so despised, she put the realization from her as a suspicion too unworthy for her to cherish.

With Carrol, to love meant to trust unquestioningly. The fact that she had even for a moment permitted herself to believe something contrary to the high opinion she held of the man she loved, filled her with poignant shame.

The memory that in his bachelor days he had won a certain notoriety because of his susceptibility to the charms of women was not, she argued, an adequate excuse for the upleaping suspicion that thrust its poison fangs into her faith. All the past was past. Donald had come to her a new man.

Their love had been of the lightning and the whirlwind. It had swept them both out of the actual into the very heaven of heavens. All memory of former loves, he declared, was consumed in the white fire of this supreme passion, this one master emotion of his life.

The test of marriage had not destroyed the

beauty of the attachment. Carrol was not exacting. She did not expect a perpetual honeymoon. When one by one Donald ceased the surface attentions and courtesies that had been the natural expression of that early love, she forgave. His love for her had not altered, she argued. It had only gone deeper. It could afford to dispense with the superfluities.

Always she argued on the side of the man she loved. With her keen ideality, her swiftness to pardon, her readiness to read her own interpretation of beauty into the disappointing things of life, she could still live in her dream-world of thankfulness and joy. The only hurt that would never heal; the only thrust that could destroy completely the realm of magic where she had her being, would be the sight of him dissatisfied, tired of her, eager for the diversion of a new experience. But such tragedy, of course, could never come to her.

So she believed, until that day of doubt. But it was only a suspicion—a mean, unfounded suspicion. She was sure of it. Donald was impulsive, genial, open in his attitude toward the persons who pleased him, men and women alike. It was only natural that he should be pleased with Miss Millard.

Donald and Carrol met her for the first time at an informal dinner musicale. They had known of her as a local celebrity and had frequently

heard their host and hostess remark upon her numerous talents, her wit, her beauty. She deserved all the laudation, as this evening's programme proved. The guests quite raved over her songs and readings.

She accepted all praise in an easy, assured, self-satisfied way. Hers was an aggressive, confident type of beauty. Her fascination was objective. She had none of the interior loveliness that made Carroll's charm so deep and potent. But on the surface she impressed. More than anything else, her egotism accomplished this.

Carroll observed her fully as Donald was introduced and saw the unmistakable, brilliant challenge in her eyes. She knew at once that here was a woman who could not care sincerely for her own sex; a woman who would disdain the rights of another to gain the masculine adoration she craved. The wife was as positive at that moment as she could ever be that Grace Millard was potentially her enemy.

As the evening progressed she felt an increasing certainty that her intuition had not misled her. Miss Millard was dauntless, though adroit, in her methods. It seemed to the wife that she could almost sense the invisible fibres flung forth to capture and hold Donald's attention. She had not long to wait to observe the effect of that telepathic invitation.

If she had ever imagined such a situation,

it had been with the assurance that Donald, above all men, would know precisely how to deal with the woman. It was here her keen disappointment came. Her husband's attitude, far from manifesting the reserve she had pictured, glowed with distinct responsiveness and pleasure as the young woman's efforts to fascinate him progressed.

Then it was that Carrol, as always, strove to put upon the matter an interpretation that wholly excused her husband. Why shouldn't he make himself agreeable to Miss Millard? Why shouldn't he even exert himself to please her? As the entertainer of the evening, she deserved a certain homage from every one present. She—Carrol—ought to be proud of him for being able to sustain so well a Chesterfieldian part.

Then came the second occasion for doubt.

Among Miss Millard's several accomplishments was that of dramatic criticism. She had won much popularity through her clever little column in one of the dailies, and at the theatres she had many privileges. These she shared freely with her friends.

Not three days after she had met the Richardsons she called Carrol by telephone and asked her to join a matinée box party. Two days later she invited them both for an evening performance. It seemed to the wife that these invitations followed rather precipitately upon the heels

of the first meeting. It looked a little too obvious, she thought. Evidently Miss Millard had small reverence for ceremony.

But it was not that which troubled her so much as the realization that Donald, in accepting the invitation for Wednesday evening, committed an oversight of which he had never before been guilty—forgot that it was their anniversary, their own especial Wednesday. For the Richardsons differed from the majority in observing their wedding day not once a year, but once a week. Always they had some little celebration “just for themselves.” Nothing was ever allowed to interfere.

Therefore when on this occasion he displayed high spirits over the prospect of spending the evening as Miss Millard’s theatre guest, the wife experienced a hateful shock. When she reminded him, he was frankly sorry.

“But never mind, girlie—we’ll make up for it next time. And besides—this will be a sort of celebration, won’t it?”

That was what pierced. To think he couldn’t see!

The third and fourth occasions followed quickly after that.

Then came the night of the fancy dress ball at which Miss Millard, as *Carmen*, was insolently, dauntlessly handsome and challenging. Carrol Richardson was herself a vision as

*Marguerite*, her long, fair hair—always the despair of her women friends—plaited and hanging below her waist; her eyes luminous with excitement.

As she entered the room Donald whispered to her that she was the most beautiful woman present. But it was not half an hour later that he seemed utterly to have forgotten her existence. *Carmen* claimed and held him, as by invisible chains.

All the evening Carrol strove to defend him within herself, although she could not ignore the glances of electric meaning that flashed between him and his bewitching partner. Stab after stab hurt her heart as she looked at the pair from time to time, seeing them always with their eyes on each other.

What wife who has known such experience can ever forget the wormwood humiliation of this first realization? The looking on and seeing her husband bestow upon another that glance of fire and meaning which heretofore she had never dreamed he could give to any save her? Oh, that first outward sign of an inward disloyalty—what humiliated woman does not recall the sting, the gall of it?

"What is it he thinks he owes her?" she cried now furiously within herself. "Hasn't he the strength to resist her advances, or the will to do it? What is this great debt every man thinks he

owes a pretty woman? What is the secret of it? Imagine me in Donald's place, if a man were acting toward me as she acts to him!"

She recalled instances in which she had been put to just such a test; when she had not hesitated to snub the offender and show him his error. Why did not Donald deal with this woman in like manner? Was he afraid?

"Is every man afraid? I was so sure, so sure Donald was an exception. Oh, I wonder, does there live a man strong enough and loyal enough to hurt the other woman in such a situation rather than hurt his wife?"

A convulsive alarm caught her heart as she observed the interested eyes of guests turn significantly toward the absorbed pair in the window seat. Above all things, her pride in Donald called for a recognition from others of his perfect loyalty to her.

As the time for leave-taking arrived at last, she made her way blindly in the direction of the dressing room. It had been a supreme effort to appear poised and sweet before the eyes of others. The limit of her strength was near.

At a turn in the corridor she encountered a group of women talking excitedly in low tones. They hushed suddenly the moment they saw her. In the dressing room another group chattered. She caught one woman's remarks, flung out in excited staccato:

"Well, he hasn't changed a particle—and I always knew it. A born flirt is always a flirt. And as for Miss Millard—every one knows *her* standards! She thinks nothing of lunching with him when his wife is not present. I myself saw them the other day—"

Some one gave the alarm and Mrs. Donald Richardson found herself in the midst of a hush that had descended with a thud. Her sudden, surging color was as vivid as the peony lining in her moch-gray evening wrap. In the mirror she stared at her reflection as one who saw a spectre. She had a sense of standing aside and looking curiously upon this humbled woman—this woman who had been herself.

She did not know anything else until she found herself descending the stairs. Was drunkenness like this, she wondered—this dizziness, this queer sensation of expanding head, parched lips, benumbed limbs, seething thoughts? There was nothing she could be sure of, nothing she could grasp.

Carrol hated jealousy in women. She had a high score for the petty naggings of the suspicious, watchful wife who thinks to retain the love of her husband by guarding it with lock and key. I'd night her fear that she might lose control and appear in the light of the jailer-wife saved the situation. She felt that nothing could tempt her to betray her suffering to Donald.



All the way home she kept her promise. "I must remember," she said to herself over and over, "I must remember that I have no proof of anything. I have nothing but the gossip of spiteful women. I cannot call Donald to judgment for that."

For two weeks she endured her torments of doubt, her struggles to be just. Then, one day, chancing to enter a downtown café after a morning's shopping tour, she found herself making straight for a table where sat two familiar figures.

The shock of recognition paralyzed her for the instant and she stood still, uncertain whether to continue her approach or to retreat. Donald and Miss Millard, fully absorbed in each other, failed to observe her at all.

One thing was certain. She could not sit at another table, unknown to them, and yet aware of them, like a detective. And she could not—no, she would not—play the melodramatic role of the wife who had "discovered." In a swift second she made her decision. Still unseen by them, she turned and quietly left the restaurant.

The succeeding days were torment to her. She had not reckoned on the fresh trial which faced her—the necessity of pretending friendship for her rival. It was not in Carrol to pretend. Such hypocrisy as that of this audacious flirt whose assumption of friendliness for her seemed on

its face so genuine and spontaneous, was a thing she hated with a hearty hatred.

Yet Donald expected her to respond fully to the overtures of this woman. That was plain. And it was on this reef that her resolution not to speak was shattered at last.

"Why don't you call on Miss Millard?" he asked her, with anxiety, one day. "It seems to me we have treated her rather shabbily. So far she has been compelled to make all the advances. We might be a bit more hospitable, don't you think?"

"I don't see why it should be a matter of compulsion, on either side," Carrol said, with sudden coldness.

He looked up, startled. Her face had taken a swift, ashen pallor. But as he gazed, a vivid flame leaped in either cheek.

"Why, Carrol—what do you mean? I thought you quite friendly to Miss Millard!"

"I cannot pretend any longer, Donald. There are reasons why it is impossible for me to do as you wish. I am astonished that you should ask me to make a friend of the woman who has come between us." Tempestuous breathing choked her.

"Carrol! Are you out of your mind?"

"No, I am quite sane. There are things that I have heard and things that I have seen. I tried not to believe at first, but—I have no choice. Please don't ask me to say any more."

Silence, intense and suffocating, dropped between them.

Then Donald spoke. "It's damnable!" he flung out; "damnable that a man should be called to judgment simply for having been courteous to an agreeable woman. May I ask what it is that you have seen and heard?"

"Several people have been commenting on your attentions to her. And I myself have personal knowledge."

"I see. You have been spying, then?"

"That is cruel of you, Donald, and wholly untrue. My seeing you was entirely an accident. You should know me well enough to be sure that I would never spy upon you."

"I am not sure of anything since you confess that you have merely pretended friendship for Miss Millard, when in your heart you were hostile to her. That, surely, was not honest."

The wife waited for control before she spoke.

"I never thought you could be so unkind, Donald. Can you not see that I had no choice, at first? I am not a jealous wife. I hated to talk of it. I would have gone on forever without speaking if I could. But your asking me to call on her—that was too much. I should think you would see my position."

"I certainly do not see your position. All this stew and ferment over a woman in whom I have

the most innocent interest! Miss Millard is nothing to me. It is all preposterous."

Carrol spoke up then quickly. "If that is true, Donald, why not agree here and now to discontinue the acquaintance? It is immaterial to either of us whether we see her again or not. Let us drop her altogether."

"That would be a concession to the gossips which I certainly do not intend to make. And besides, I have already given her every reason to believe we intend to pursue the acquaintance. I told her you would call upon her."

"Ah!" sighed his wife, with a sharp, quick breath. "You *can't* give her up!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded angrily.  
"I mean that I understand."

"Now it is you who are unjust. Do you realize what a slur you cast upon a sister woman? Above all things, Carrol, I had believed you to be fair to your own sex. I assure you that you have not only cruelly misjudged me, but Miss Millard as well."

She was silent.

"You see, Carrol," her husband pursued, in controlled, gentle tones, "the entire trouble arises from the fact that you do not understand Miss Millard. To you she probably seems an unscrupulous, worldly woman. I grant she is a woman of the world—her profession has made her that—but worldly she certainly is not. She is just

as womanly and sweet of nature as any of the women you have chosen for friends. The only difference is, that she is broader—more like a man in her views. She doesn't think any more of lunching with a man friend than with a woman friend. I admit we have lunched together once or twice—it occurred naturally. You know she is downtown much of the time and she sometimes patronizes the same restaurant where I have always gone for lunch. That is where you probably saw us. It seems a pity——”

“Why didn't you mention it at the time? If it occurred naturally, without prearrangement, why didn't you refer to it?”

“I admit I ought to have mentioned it. Perhaps I felt instinctively that you would object, that you wouldn't understand. If a man's wife would only be broad-minded and *let* him take her into his confidence about such things, he wouldn't be likely to keep anything from her, ever. If you——”

“I have always been broad-minded and generous, too!” cried Carrol. “You cannot truthfully say I have not.”

“I really believe you do try to be fair-minded. That is why I am sure you will take a different attitude now about this matter. As I started to say a moment ago, it seems a pity that Miss Millard's eagerness to be friendly should be so misconstrued. She really likes you immensely,

Carrol, and is anxious to prove it. You can show your fairness by being gracious to her and giving her a chance to prove her sincerity. And you can best show your fairness to me, dear, by trusting me."

The wife sighed swiftly, sharply. "Please don't say any more, Donald. I can't think—I can't reason now. I only know something has happened that I can't adjust my mind to in the least. I must have time."

She was unyielding as stone when he kissed her good-night. Her gaze upon him was blank, half wild. "I don't mean to be this way, Donald, but I can't help it—not now. Perhaps to-morrow it will be different."

And to-morrow it was different. Carrol was one of those rare women whose receptivity and anxiety to be strictly just make it easy for them to see two sides of a question. In the sunshine of a new day she faced this question squarely, viewed its two sides, and in her eagerness to be fair to Donald and the other woman became unfair to herself.

She entered his mind, as it were; adjusted herself to his viewpoint; saw herself as he saw her; and judged him as he wished her to judge him. She looked upon herself as the mistaken one—the petty, suspicious wife, ungenerous toward a sister woman. The following week she called upon Miss Millard.

Always it had been that Carrol Richardson's generosity made her easily the prey of the unscrupulous who had designs upon her or hers. She was no match for one so daring as this woman, one who had such scant delicacy that she felt no qualms in using the wife to appropriate the husband.

Carrol came to see more and more that without the sympathy and co-operation of her husband, she was powerless to avert the catastrophe she knew impended. It was an actual invasion of her home—nothing less. And the interloper—sweet, winning, and apparently innocent through it all—was without compunction.

From day to day the wife became aware that a new Donald was being formed, an alien individual with whom she had few points of contact. With all his pretense of unaltered affection for her, he had become an actual stranger, a man she could not hope to understand.

It seemed wordlessly cruel to the wife that just at this time of her experience such bitter transformation should take place. Above all, she had hoped that this period would be one of perfect understanding and beautiful sympathy between them.

Motherhood! How she had longed for it, dreamed of it—always with the thought of Donald's perfect sympathy. She had pictured

him sharing with her the joy and sacredness of it, planning with her the future of their child.

And now—

Passionate rebellion shook her as from day to day she realized how completely the intruder was separating her husband from her.

"He is giving her what belongs to me!" she cried fiercely within herself. "It is I who need the nourishment of understanding. It is I who crave consideration, tenderness, sympathy. I am starving for attention and love. She is stealing what belongs to me!"

She saw now what her unselfishness and generosity had accomplished.

Yet she was powerless to do anything but keep up the ghastly pretense. Any other attitude on her part would mean discord between herself and Donald. The moment she uttered a word of her real feeling, she became aware that a wall of displeasure separated her wholly from the man she loved.

Yes, she did love him—that was the terrible part. The ideal she had been worshipping so long was not to be easily demolished. She could not bring herself to believe that there was no foundation for the hopes she had builded all those blissful months of early love. The true Donald was obscured for a time; he had gone into a far country. He would return—she was sure of it.

But how could she bear the interval?

At last, swept out of her customary control by an incident that proved the interloper's real intentions, she cried to him suddenly:

"Oh, Donald, don't you see—can't you see? She is my enemy—she is the enemy of married love. If you would only see it, Donald!"

"You are hysterical, Carrol. There is no occasion for such a scene as this. You are magnifying trifles to the most ridiculous proportions. You surely do not expect me to sympathize with you in your present childish mood."

"Childish!" she repeated, in a voice whose strange fury startled him. "It is you who are childish, that you cannot even glimpse the magnitude of the wrong you do me. Listen, Donald!"

She came close to him, standing so that he saw all the concentrated pleading in her white, miserable face.

"Donald, I want you to tell me the truth. I believe now that you have been afraid to tell it, all along. You have not been honest with me. Wait—I mean just this: Your ideal of married love is different from mine. A man's concept of loyalty and a woman's, they are not the same. A man hates to undeceive his wife——"

"Carrol!"

"I know it shocks you, but that is better than my suffering and suspense. I tell you, I cannot live in it any longer. Let other wives go on

blindly, building their cloud castles—but for me, I want the truth. Every bit of it, Donald! I must have it!"

"What is it you insist on knowing?"

"I wish to understand, plainly, just what your idea of married loyalty is. What is your standard of devotion to a wife?"

"Why, Carrol, you know perfectly well——"

"That's just it—I don't know anything perfectly well. I thought I did, but I don't. I ask you to tell me."

"This is absurd, dear. One would think you had reason to doubt my love for you. Do you mean to imply that I do not love you any more?"

"You call it love, then—the careless, lukewarm affection that you give to me. Do you imagine for one moment I am deceived? Do you suppose I have forgotten the ardent love you once gave to——"

"But Carrol, surely, dear, you understand that! You know, and I know, that the glamour of our love faded long ago. We love each other, but not in the same way. I mean——"

"Go on, Donald."

"The novelty of our infatuation wore away long ago, of course. Sensible people expect that. It is not reasonable that the fever of romance should last forever. The feeling I have for you is a deep affection, a sort of friendship——"

"Friendship!" she said within herself. "Would it were as high and strong as that!"

But aloud she said, "Go on," and her eyes were hollow with the pain of his confession.

"It must always be so, in the lives of men and women," he went on. "Marriage should be comradeship, not romance. Women should understand that. The whole trouble with our educational system is, that girls are not brought up to regard this question sanely. They are fed on dreams and illusions."

"Dreams and illusions!"

"It is the truth, Carrol. Most husbands would lack the courage to tell you this. But it is best, after all, to face the facts, isn't it?"

"You mean," said the wife, and she dragged the words from her. "You mean that you are tired of me. You cannot be content with our stale affection. You need—other companionship."

"If that is your interpretation it is most unjust," he said indignantly. "The question of other companionship does not enter. I am simply saying that you should bring yourself to view our married love more sensibly. Nature did not intend the thrill and the glamour to remain forever."

"It's a lie!" she cried furiously, turning upon him with a suddenness that took his breath away. "A lie, I say! Love—real love—does last. It is

because you are a man that you say it, because you have never known love—never! My love is as radiant, as magical to-day as it ever was; it would be greater now than ever if you would let it. The thrill and beauty have vanished for you —why? I will tell you, Donald."

The fury of her voice hushed suddenly, making it even more intense. She pressed closer, her brilliant eyes unwavering.

"I will tell you. It is because you have never really loved *me*, the real self of me. You men don't love. You seek sensation, and when one sensation is over you are ready for another. You don't *love*! You can't! Why, Donald, it isn't *me* you're tired of, for you have never really known me. You and I are strangers under one roof. Look at me, Donald!"

He looked, and as he looked he marveled, for it seemed to him that a new Carroll of fire and splendor breathed through the flesh—a creature awesome, beautiful. But he could not bring himself to meet her yet. She baffled, troubled him.

He bent his eyes upon the floor as she went on breathlessly:

"If you knew me, Donald, if you were joined to me in the truest sense, you would not, you could not humiliate me as you have done. You would be my helper, my comforter at this time of wonderful anticipation and anxiety, this time

which should be the most beautiful in the experience of woman——”

Her voice broke and she stood quivering.

“Carrol, I am sorry. I hope you will forgive me.”

The words had come, the words she wanted; but the voice that uttered them chilled her to her soul’s marrow. A great sigh lifted her breast and left her limp and aching.

It was Donald—the stranger; the man she could never hope to reach.

He came to her and put his arm about her, patted her hand, smoothed her hair, murmured to her some tender thing. But through it all she remained cold and despairing. It was all on the surface. The old Donald was not there. The real significance of the hour did not penetrate. Even now he had not the slightest knowledge of her real needs, her soul suffering.

“Donald,” she said faintly, “I want you to do something for me. Will you promise?”

“Certainly, dear. I will do anything in my power to make you comfortable and happy.”

“Then give up Miss Millard. Give up the friendship wholly. Surely you will not refuse me now.”

He gave a quick impatient sigh. “Please, Carrol——”

“Donald, you must. I suffer so, especially at this time when my nerves are so tense, my brain

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so sensitive to impressions. If you force me to put it so, I beg, I implore you——”

“Let us not talk about it now, Carrol, while you are so agitated. Wait until you are calmer, dear. You must rest; what you need is quiet. Let us not discuss it now.”

She closed her eyes and a heavy stillness fell upon her. Donald leaned over and grasped her hand, as in sudden compunction.

“Don’t make it so hard for me, Carrol. I don’t want to refuse you.”

She sat up gasping, and flung off his hand with sudden passion.

“How dare you—how dare you pretend? I don’t want it—this false love! I won’t accept it!”

He hardened in an instant. “Very well, Carrol. If you refuse my sympathy I am powerless to give it. If you will not permit me to love you——”

“Love!” she gasped. “Love! Do you suppose if you loved me you would not give up at once your friendship for this woman, the very sight of whom is hateful to me?”

“There is no reason for your antipathy.”

“Oh, Donald,” she implored, “I beg of you to put yourself in my place! Try to see my need!”

“Carrol, I must ask you to put yourself in my place. Do you realize what I have been compelled to endure all this while?”

“You, Donald?”

Her mind seemed to start as at an unwonted summons. A hint of impending calamity brushed her brain darkly, as the flapping shadow of a great evil bird. Was it possible that his selfishness——”

“Yes, I. Every evening I come home from the office to find you blue and out of sorts, and then because I am glad of the companionship of one so cheery as Miss Millard you torment me with complaints. Do you imagine that is exactly pleasant?”

She sat staring at him, unable to articulate a word. Twice she opened her lips to speak, but her voice died in her throat. She began rocking back and forth, dumbly wretched.

At last she spoke faintly, with tremulous effort: “You ask to be amused, entertained, diverted. I ask to be saved from heartbreak. Oh, Donald, if you could only feel as I do—oh, Donald!”

She felt as if she were calling to him across a vast sea; and the wind snatched her voice and shredded it to vapor before it scarce left her lips. She was alone. The man she loved, whom she had married, and for whom she was to bear a child, was not even her friend.

“Donald!” she cried, wildly now as if she would appeal to that forgotten love, as if she would resurrect the man who once had seemed to understand. “Donald! Try to see, dear; try to

get my view. Forget your own. Think—what is your condition of mental weariness or annoyance or lack, to mine of actual anguish? Is it my fault that I cannot minister at this time, but must be ministered to, instead? Oh, is motherhood a crime that I should be so blamed, so rebuked? Oh, you men—you men! If you could only suffer one thousandth part the agony we women must endure. Oh, if you *could* know!"

"There, there, Carrol! I feared this—I feared it from the first. You are overwrought—you are hysterical. Come, dear, lie down and rest. You must be quiet. Here, dear, let me help you."

She shuddered. "Don't touch me, Donald! Don't!"

"Carrol, I must insist—"

"I'll do it—I'll go to bed and rest—I'll do anything if you'll just go away now. Go, please, I beg of you. I must be alone—yes, yes, I'll be all right—I'll do as you say. Only go."

She did not keep her promise. She could not. A very fury seemed to possess her. She was all alive, alert, her brain on fire. The house was inadequate to hold her, in her fiercely expanding mood.

She dressed in a frantic, unseeing fashion, as one swept wholly out of the objective by the strength of a great subjective experience. She scarcely saw the garments she donned, and was still buttoning her coat when she reached the

street. Gloves and furs she had forgotten.

She walked on and on, anywhere—anywhere! The surge of a storm was in her ears. All was chaos and tumultuous darkness. She was not Carroll Richardson, wife of Donald Richardson, any longer. She was a stranger to herself, a stranger to the universe; a solitary being out in space, tossing and eddying in a whirlpool of agony. "And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The words chanted themselves in her brain. The earth—the earth! The sorrowful planet. The planet where people lived and loved and suffered.

Gradually she became half conscious of the direction her steps pursued. The roar of the inner storm resolved itself into the rushing and dashing of actual waters. Lake Michigan was lashing itself into fury under the bleak sky of the November afternoon. The lake shore stretched ahead, mile after mile. The thought of distance did not tire her. She wanted distance—she wanted space.

Terrible questions assailed her, hurled against her brain like bullets; some glancing off, others penetrating and leaving throbbing wounds that pained and pained. Had she been deluded, after all, wholly deceived? Was love itself a delusion? Had Donald never really loved her in those past days of rapture and perfect understanding? What

horrible happening was this that showed her the whole structure of her beliefs and faiths as a thing lacking substance or reality?

It was true then—everything she had said to him an hour ago in her moment of sudden fury; he had never really known love for her, his wife. His body and his mind had loved her, but his spirit never. The experience which had been a miracle of beauty and wonder, touching into fire her entire mental and spiritual world, had reached him only on the external.

When he had said to her, in those days of early love: "My life is wrapped up in you. You are mine!" he had meant her physical self, the self he could possess as one possesses a commodity. And he was tired of that self now, so tired that he craved the diversion of a new experience; craved it and would not be denied.

"It is because he has never known me—*me!*"

She flung the words to the winds and they were drowned in the roar of waters. A few feet more and the skirting stretch of beach narrowed, giving the waters little margin from the shore she traversed. Great breakers came rushing in, dashing against the protecting wall. The fury of them was like the fury of her soul's protest.

She sank upon the sand, panting, exhausted. It was not her body alone that ached. Beyond the confines of her body she felt her larger self stretching away in quivering reaches of pain.

And was this the way all women suffered when men tired of them? Did they pass through the blood and fire of such disillusionment as she had known?

How long she remained thus, crouched upon the sand, she had no knowledge. Time was a thing her anguish blotted out. Nothing existed but the cavern of her woe.

Not until she arose and started home did she realize how weak her body was. On and on she dragged herself, while her will pushed and strained to make the trembling body serve her. But she grew fainter with each fresh exertion.

At last she could see the spire of the church that was four blocks away. Four blocks—could she make it? Her mind reeled in the reckoning. Still she pressed on. At the door of her home at last she felt her strength stop suddenly, as a cord that snaps.

Blackness closed in upon her then. After a time the dark was pierced by a cry that struck her senses like a ball of light. She felt herself being lifted and carried. Then pain took possession of her. Through the agony she was conscious of Donald, bending above her, crying her name repeatedly, caressing her, beseeching her. And darkness again swallowed her up.

Through the terror of the succeeding days Donald Richardson lived as a man walking close to the very edge of life. At first his shocked

senses had refused to take in the full meaning of the calamity. All the forces of his life had been drawn sharply, suddenly, to meet one stupefying dread. He had been jerked to the very brink of the void, brought face to face with the outer darkness, but his stunned faculties could not understand.

Then realization came, complete, relentless. He saw the full horror of the unknowable gulf. Not once, but every day, he saw it. Every hour Fate pressed his face down close to the brink and made him look over into the merciless abyss.

Never before had he been in the presence of a desperate illness. The suspense of it, the long, aching stretches of uncertainty, the watching, the waiting, the leaping hope that changed so swiftly to despair—all these were new to him.

Night after night he sat by Carroll's bedside and listened to the ravings of her delirium. Every day there was the same ghastly uncertainty in the physician's statement; every day there was the same calm, set, negative look in the face of the nurse. They were spectres to him—the physician and the nurse. For though he begged them, though he got down on his knees to them, they would give him no hope, nor would they take hope from him. They left him always to the tyranny of suspense.

Then came a day when the doctor said: "It is the crisis. To-night will decide the outcome."

And on that night Donald Richardson passed through his Gethsemane. All her words came back to him, flung against the black of his suffering in letters of fire. He saw the meaning of them at last.

"Oh, Donald, is it my fault that I cannot minister at this time, but must be ministered to instead? Is motherhood a crime that I should be so rebuked? Oh, you men—you men! If you could only suffer one thousandth part the agony we women must endure. Oh, if you only *could* know!"

To think he had not seen! In what mire of selfishness had he been groveling? The awful urge of his suffering, the torture of suspense, pushed his mind on up into a keen, high region of understanding—a miracle region where everything was made terribly clear.

He entered her mind, felt as she had felt, saw as she had seen, suffered as she had suffered. His consciousness was one with hers. At last he understood.

And then her passionate, beautiful confession. "My love is as radiant, as magical to-day as it ever was! The thrill and the beauty have vanished for you—I will tell you why, Donald. It is because you have never really loved *me*—the real self in me. You have never even seen me—Look at me, Donald!"

No, he had not known her. He recalled his awe

when he had looked at her, as she bade him do, and had seen the strange, mystic creature of fire and splendor breathe through the flesh. He had not been ready to meet that strange, new Carrol. He had not been ready then. But he was ready now. He would wade through seas of torment, make any sacrifice, if he might bring her back to him; if he might show her the might of his worship, the strength of his understanding.

If she should die—and he could not tell her!

All his being rushed, protesting, toward one tense, breathless point of fierce resistance.

“She shall not die—she *shall not!*”

Toward morning the change came. The doctor spoke to him softly as he knelt rigid with waiting and with watching.

“She will live,” he said.

The husband did not stir from where he crouched by the bed. But his head fell forward on his arms and his whole body shook.

One week later Carrol sat up in bed and saw the dawn. She was faint and trembling yet, but she wanted to see the sun come up over the world.

“It’s all like being born again,” she said. “I feel just like a little child. Everything is new, everything is wonderful to me.”

All during her convalescence she had that miracle consciousness of coming into a new, beautiful world of sweetness and enchantment.

The horror of her experience had been totally erased from her mind. Nothing remained but peace.

Her husband's presence was part of this peace. Something had happened to make him over new. She felt his repentance like a mantle of sweetness that wrapped her close about. She knew all his humility, his gratitude, his worship.

How it had come about—she could not tell. She only knew it was so and she basked in the consciousness, let herself float on a very sea of happiness. It was the beauty of their honeymoon repeated, but infinitely more marvelous.

One day as she lay back among her pillows, watching him perform some little service for her—he was always serving her now, and he never tired—the joy of it rushed over her lips in speech.

"Donald, you've really come back—I always knew you would; I knew it *must* be."

He gathered her in his arms, and pressed her to him and held her as though he would never let her go. But he could not speak.

"I understand, dear," Carrol whispered. "I understand."



## **SUCH IS THE LOVE OF WOMAN**

“We may not be doomed  
To cope with seraphs, but at least the rest  
Shall cope with us . . .  
See if we cannot beat thine angels yet!”



## SUCH IS THE LOVE OF WOMAN

**A**S she went up the storm-shaken hill, she exulted in the furious crimson of the west. It had been such a day as she loved—fierce, wind-torn, splendid; with shouting elements, mad for expression, buffeting the mountains, swooping down upon the valleys, raging round and round the hills in sheer intoxication of might.

And now it seemed as if, in that one supreme hurl of vehement red, the spirit of the tempest had uttered itself at last. No storms ever seemed bleak or cold to Lida. Violence, surely, meant passion; and passion could not be cold. Even when it flung forth as sleet and rain and stinging winter blast, there was behind it, always, an unseen lightning power; a dynamic emotion, loosed from some giant storehouse of energy.

Now the road veered and ran upward toward Mount Marcy. As Lida turned, a fiendish wall of wind reared and defied her to advance. She bent forward, pushing her might against it, triumphing in her own resistance. Then she let go and dropped the whole of her weight upon the obstacle.

It held her, poised and unresisting, meeting her trust with solid support. Her own strength and the strength of the elements mingled in a triumphant moment of savage understanding. Another turn, and the wind ran along with her, in boisterous intimacy, urging her to its own tempestuous abandon.

If she could only view that mad sunset from the very summit of the mountains! Often she had made the climb, rejoicing in the endurance of her lithe limbs, while others, older and harder, lagged and desponded. But she could not attempt it at this hour. Back there in the weather-beaten little cottage, a host of homely duties called her. Soon she must return. But not now! She could not tear herself from the splendor yet.

It was her only means of freedom—this chance to get away among the hills and let loose her tumultuous self upon the elements. Every day she snatched her opportunity, or fretted when she was cheated of it. No one could guess what these mountain walks meant to her—how they saved her from suffocation in that cramped, bitter life back there in the little cottage; the life that roughened her hands and hurt her soul and clamped her in a rut of cruel monotony.

Her freed spirit mounted now and streamed out upon the winds, shouting as they shouted, wild with liberty. She was strong and straight, like an Indian, with a beauty of line that was

muscular yet wholly feminine. Her face, exposed daily to the weather, had been beautified rather than blemished by contact with the open. Nearly every summer maid or matron she had ever seen in that section of the Adirondacks had gone back to the city with skin turned leathery and freckled from defiance of the sun. Not so with Lida. Her cheek, transparent and satin-smooth, was ripe as a dogwood leaf, burnt by October flame.

In the glow of the sunset now, her whole countenance was illumined. The reflected fire burnished her dusk-brown hair to bronze, touched amber lights in her black impetuous eyes.

Now she had reached an eminence which commanded a sweeping view of the panorama below. She halted and leaned upon an old stone wall, drawing her breath deeply, smitten to the soul with beauty. And as she stood, leaning to the crimson, drinking its wine, there came over her the wish, stung through with passionate regret.

Oh, if someone—someone who understood—could only share with her the rapture, the enchantment! It was always so, at times of supreme magic such as this. Forever, at the core of her joy, a pang reminded her of its incompleteness. Just now it seemed a crime that this lavish glory should be poured out upon her,

unshared. She felt suddenly that she could not bear it.

Response! That was what she longed for. She had never known it by that name, but that was it. And no one had ever given it to her; not once in her life had she even approached a realization of it—not in her eager, thwarted childhood, or her intense, unhappy girlhood. Now it seemed a thing as far beyond her reach as the fabled pot of gold at the rainbow's base.

Yet, always the hope of it loomed, big and beautiful. It would not die out. Or was it that her tenacious spirit, vehement, insistent, clung to the vision and would not let it go?

Lida sighed swiftly, and turning, began the descent. She must go back now to the petty and the commonplace. She must take up the struggle again—the endless struggle to keep faith with beauty in the very presence of ugliness and blight.

It came to her now, how her entire existence had been made up of that effort to put a halo about the world. She would have romance, whether it was there or not. She *would* see things and people as she wanted them to be.

A quick, amused smile, just tinged with bitterness, curved her lips now as she remembered. Even the few stolid, indifferent men who had come into her life had been granted their share of the halo. She had forced her imagination to

endow them with the charms and qualities she yearned for. How ardently she had tried to find in each that unknown something! She had even striven, valiantly, to believe herself in love, when in her soul she knew it could not be. And when disappointment came, ruthless and unmistakable, she had cried a little and lifted her heart and gone on smiling, with that great undying hope still beckoning.

She knew now, in a keen moment of perception, what it was that had always given color and meaning to existence for her.

Was she, indeed, a fool to keep on hoping?

Sometimes, she thought so. Summer after summer passed, yet the dream remained a dream. Visitors came and went; boarders sojourned at her mother's table—but no one ever came who in the least resembled that wonderful picture shining back there in her brain.

In fact, nothing that happened about the boarders was as she had dreamed it would be. That had been another one of the brutal mockeries. There was a time once, when she had looked forward to the coming of strangers from the city as an epoch-making event. Her riotous imagination had shown her a brand new life rich with companionship, stimulated to big aims and achievements.

It had all turned out to mean something so pitilessly different, that now the mere mention

of boarders filled her with intense repugnance. She had been waitress, chambermaid, errand girl and nurse, all in one ruthless cycle of toil, repeated every summer season. Well, that bondage was over, for a space. Dismal though it was, the winter offered relief. But oh, the loneliness!

As Lida approached the house now, depression dropped upon her; steel clamps closed down upon her rebellious soul. She was no longer a wild, free thing, an unfurled spirit, riding the winds. She was just a commonplace, illiterate country girl, with red hands and clumsy clothes.

The transformation was as swift and real as the change that swept over Cinderella when her royal garb slipped from her and she went back again to drudgery. Lida was always sharply conscious of this metamorphosis. She recognized, instinctively, her dual personality; knew when the goddess departed and the unhappy mortal took her place.

One more turn in the road, and she reached the rough brown cottage that was her prison. In the little kitchen, blue with smoke from frying mush, she found her mother fretting over her long absence, for it was supper time and the table was set waiting. Lida detected at once an unusual excitement in the air.

"You're all in a flurry, mother. Everybody's acting queer. What's happened?"

Ben and Jimmy, warming their hands at the range where their mother worked, half chuckled, then ducked their heads and slid away as if from coming trouble.

Mrs. Bowen was a brown, wiry, muscular-armed little woman, with practical eyes and a furrowed forehead. As a rule, she was direct and unafraid in her dealings with Lida. But there was a topic she forever approached with fear and trembling. When she had made up her mind, however, she wasted no words.

"It's something you won't like," she said, hurrying the dishes on in the helter-skelter way that Lida hated. "Dr. Fanning came while you was away—he's got some patients that wants to stay up in the mountains all of the cold weather—"

"Oh, mother!" deplored the girl. She dropped upon a chair. Before her eyes there swept a vision of the old remorseless labor. She had hoped for a breathing space before the spring and summer boarding season.

"Now, Lida! I didn't promise to take but one of 'em. He's a man, just come out of the hospital—he's had pleurisy or something, and he's got to stay in the fresh air all the time—"

"Cranky and sick people!" raged the insurgent. "I tell you, mother, I just can't and won't—"

"Now, Lida, there's no use bein' foolish. Beggars can't be choosers. 'Taint everybody can

have boarders in winter. You'd ought to be thankful, on your knees, 'stead of fussin' an' complainin'. It'll mean big prices—the best we've had yet—and we've got to think of the money, Lida. We can rent the two front rooms, upstairs——”

“Then where'll we sleep, mother? Ain't we ever going to think about ourselves?”

“Ben and Jimmy can sleep out in the barn.”

“In the cold weather? They shan't.”

“Well, I'll sleep there myself.”

“Now, mother, you know you *can't*. It'd kill you. We can't do it, I tell you. There's no use talking. It's a perfect shame! I thought *sometime* in our lives we were going to have a chance to enjoy our own house in peace. Ever since I can remember we've had to huddle up, any kind of an old way, and make ourselves doormats for other people. Boarders ain't worth it—they ain't!”

“Well, Lida, I can't help it. The doctor begged so hard. ‘Please, Mrs. Bowen, he says, for the sake of a man whose life depends on mountain air. So I just *had* to promise——”

“You promised?” gasped her daughter. “Without askin' us children—without even telling us——”

“I don't know's it's my place to go a beggin' an' askin' of my children!” flared the mother, with sudden spirit. “And what's more, he's here

now, settin' in the parlor this very minute. An' we've all got to eat our supper in a hurry, so's he can have his by half-past six. That's his hour an' we've got to keep it reg'lar."

Lida sat transfixed by the shock. Then she jumped to her feet. "I'll not keep it reg'lar. You can do it if you like, but not me. I tell you, I won't do one single thing for him. I'll do all the kitchen work and the baking and the cleaning, but I won't slave for invalids!"

"Listen to Miss Independence!" Mrs. Bowen appealed to her sons, now noisily drawing up their chairs.

"Aw, Lidy! Wait till you see him—you'll change your tune," predicted Ben, intent on fried potatoes.

"I'm not going to see him," the girl protested, stubbornly, though an indefinable change had come over her features.

"Ha, ha!" taunted her brothers. "We'll see!"

"Yes we will see!" she retorted, her resolve hardening to iron in that instant. Nothing under heaven, she told herself, could move her now.

Before the evening was over, she showed them that she meant what she said. It was Mrs. Bowen who served the invalid at dinner, and arranged his room later. It was Ben and Jimmy who carried wood for his fire and fetched things up and down the stairs. Not once did Lida catch even a glimpse of the newcomer, but she

heard his voice; and at the very first tone she felt her resolution tremble. Never before had Lida heard such a voice. It smote the depths of her powerfully, as if an organ note had pealed suddenly in the brutal monotony of her life.

There was something wonderful about the incident; not seeing him, but meeting him thus intimately, through the medium of his voice alone, wafted to her from the upper hallway when the kitchen door stood open. It impressed her, in the darkness, as the mere sight of his features could not possibly have done. Deep toned and mellow, it was a voice that seemed to vibrate, like music, even after he had ceased speaking. There was a quality in it, too, like light, so that nothing really seemed dark any longer.

Intensely conscious, next day, of the family's watchfulness, that looked to see her yield at any moment, the girl realized what a trap she had set for herself by her own stubbornness. Retraction would be impossible now, without their ridicule. All day she persisted in keeping the background, working in the kitchen while the others attended to the needs of the boarder. But her purpose shook again when she heard his voice. The test came when he went out on the veranda to take his walk, for he was obliged frequently to pass the window where she stood ironing. Lida was aware in every fibre of the

presence outside the window. Without really looking, she already felt the distinction of the tall figure in its long gray overcoat, and had seen that the face was such as should belong by right to the voice she had heard.

Now she darted a quick glance and saw his features fully. He seemed a man of thirty-five or more, whose illness, though it had wasted him somewhat, was almost concealed by the strong blond-tan of his coloring. His eyes, like his voice, had magnetism. They were fine, warm eyes of the topaz color, with sparks of gold in them. Again and again the girl's glance was drawn to him, until finally, looking up, the color flooded her face, for she found herself gazing straight into the topaz eyes. Involuntarily, his cap came off, and Lida saw, to her astonishment, that his hair on top was as innocently sunny as a child's, giving a surprisingly youthful effect to an otherwise mature personality.

Lida electrified the family that evening by bursting into the kitchen with a vehement question: "Does anybody know where we can get a decent couch for that parlor?"

Mrs. Bowen wheeled, with a gasp. "Well, I never! What's the matter with the sof'y in there, I'd like to know?"

"That sofa," said her daughter, distinctly, "is entirely too short for Mr. Penfield. He humps in it. If we must board invalids, we've got to take

care of them. I never saw anything like this family—nobody notices anything but me. If I didn't look out for your sick people, they'd starve and freeze to death."

But her bravado did not deceive the boys.  
"Aha, Lidy! What did we tell you?"

To divert attention from her confusion, she went to the wood box and began to fumble over the few logs it contained.

"Can't this family ever keep enough wood in the house? I never saw anything like you boys for laziness. How many times do I have to tell you——"

"Ho, Lidy! How does it happen you're so fond of the wood question, all of a sudden? Wonder whose fire needs fixin'?"

Lida would not face her mother, but the tips of her ears and back of her neck showed scarlet.

"Come on, Jimmy," the girl cried, abruptly, determined now to brave it out as best she could.  
"Come on—I'll help you get some wood in."

On the way to the shed she looked up and saw how lavish the stars were. The air had that marvelous tang she had tasted in it, when a child. Often, in late girlhood, she had wondered if it would ever seem quite that way again. She lifted her head, now, and thrilled to the sharp, sweet edge of it.

After that night, the merciless chaffing of the family affected her not at all. The new emotion

that had come to her was stronger far than any fear of taunt or jest. Pride and sensitiveness shriveled in the fire of it.

One morning she sought her mother with a reproachful question. "Why didn't you use those blankets I told you to, mother? You promised. If I'd thought you didn't intend to do it—"

"They're way down in the bottom of the brown trunk. I don't know's I ought to use 'em, anyway—when cousin Jack gave 'em to me—"

"Nonsense, mother! He's got to have them. He's used to everything—the very best."

"Well, Lida, if you ain't the most contrary! You seemed to think the ones we had was good enough for the other boarders. Do give an argyment that's got some sense into it."

"But Mr. Penfield is a sick man, mother! He needs care."

"Well, wasn't the other folks sick people, too, an' didn't they need care, I'd like to know?"

Lida gasped and turned suddenly to go.

"Lida!" called Mrs. Bowen. "If you take them blankets out of that trunk—"

But the girl had already vanished on the mission she was determined to fulfill.

An intense solicitude seized her, lest the weather prove unfavorable. Each morning she looked eagerly to see the sun, and her heart sank when the bleak days came. On one of these chill mornings, she watched him from the window,

wondering if it were right that he should be out in such an atmosphere.

It was a day magnificently bleak, with mountains lying ruggedly blue against an uncompromising sky. Although there was no wind or storm, the scene had a splendid energy in its strength and sweep of coloring alone. Anxiety for him strove within her against natural backwardness. Up to this time, she had never dared to address him, save in the spirit of service, and she was diffident, even then. She hesitated now some moments, until solicitude got the better of her timidity. Throwing a wrap about her, she ventured upon the piazza, taking an extra muffler to him.

"Are you sure—sure you ought to be out in such—such weather as this?" she stammered. And then she saw that his mood was close and absorbed, for he scarcely turned as he replied:

"Oh, it's good for me—all of it. You must not worry about me, Miss Lida."

Lida was yet to learn the变ability of his moods. To-day he was quite different from the man who had first disclosed himself to her by means of a golden voice, heard in the dark. Nor was he the man whose gaze she had met as she stood ironing at the kitchen window. His personality seemed to have taken on solidity and strength, almost a sternness of line. His eyes, steel-brown with a gravity she had not seen

before, totally belied the amber eyes of yesterday. The girl received the swift impression that as he looked now—tall and earnest, with that sense of power about him—he appeared habitually in health.

"I—I didn't mean to disturb you. I just thought you might not be warm enough."

Something in her voice made him turn suddenly and then he saw her face, frankly disappointed as a child's. He saw, too, the muffler in her hand and was all sympathy at once. "Oh, Miss Lida—how thoughtful! I don't deserve it—Don't run away—please don't. This view is too wonderful to miss. Do you know, after all, I believe I like the bleak days best? That's when the Adirondacks are at their finest. Honestly now, don't you think so? Look," he said, pointing. "Aren't they superb—those unrelenting grays and purples and the great sweeps of indigo? It isn't bleak to me—it's powerful. I only wish there were wind and tumult with it."

"You love the storm?" the question escaped her, before she knew.

"Oh, I exult in it. I love the really fierce days, when the house rocks. There's something savage in us all—or is it savage? Maybe it's super-human. I wonder, is it that we're savages or gods, Miss Lida?"

It was the very first time in her life that she had heard her deep, unspoken thought expressed.

The joy of it smote her dumb, though a very passion of speech surged in her. Hundreds of thoughts, dammed and discouraged throughout a lifetime, leaped toward the outlet they sighted at last. Oh, to make him feel the beauty of the thoughts that clamored in her! The force of her desire swept her suddenly out of self-consciousness. She forgot that she was Lida, whose part it was to keep the background.

"Why," she cried, impetuously, "that's like what I feel—that's like what I think!"

He did not look at her. "Do you?" he mused, "Do you, indeed?"

She understood. To him, she was the untutored country girl, feeble of thought and emotion. To flatter her, he had assumed that she would follow him, but he did not really expect it. He did not see her as she was—he did not even guess. She saw at last what a tragedy it was—her lack of education. It was her words that had so travestied her real meaning. No matter what might of eloquence beat in her, she could not tell it. That was the real difference between them.

Unconsciously she clenched her hands and the tears started. Did dumb animals feel so, she wondered, when they tried to make themselves articulate?

"It's like thunder pounding in me. If I could

just speak what I feel—but I can't. And it hurts!"

She had not known she could say it, but somehow the words had scrambled to her tongue and jumped off. Penfield, taken utterly by surprise, turned quickly. Now, indeed, she felt the full force of his attention.

"Tell me about it, Miss Lida—do! Come—take a turn in this bracing air and tell me."

But self-consciousness again had claimed her. She stood abashed and terror-stricken, like a child.

"Come," he said again. With ready tact he ignored her embarrassment and took the reins of the conversation.

"Do you know, truly—you've expressed it perfectly, Miss Lida? It's just what I've been trying to say, all this while, in my blundering man's fashion. But I didn't say it, did I? After all, it takes a woman to put such thoughts into words."

He kept his eyes away and that relieved her. Before she knew it, they were both swinging along in step, and her courage had returned. She was Lida, the storm girl, creature of wind and fury.

"It's always been like that with me," she told him. "Folks couldn't understand—they never did, from the first. They called me sullen and

cross, and they said I never could be satisfied with nothing——”

She stopped short, dismayed. In her excitement she had made the error. “I mean—never could be satisfied with *anything*. Well—maybe I am cross. Maybe I am hateful, sometimes. But you see—it’s like this—I don’t *mean* to be hateful—I don’t mean to be sullen. I just simply —oh it’s just that everything strikes me——”

“Everything smites you with such force. Isn’t that it?” he suggested kindly. “These mild, phlegmatic people can’t understand it—the events of life strike their senses indifferently. They don’t suffer as you do. They don’t feel things.”

“That’s it—that’s it exactly. It’s just that I feel *everything* so terribly!”

“Do you know, Miss Lida—truly I believe there is always a reason for the ill-humored people—the irritable people that can’t seem to become adjusted? We blame them and we ridicule them—in our blind, unfeeling way—but that’s because we don’t know any better. The human race doesn’t know very much, after all. It’s just blundering along—in its infancy, and there are millions of things it gets twisted about. This matter of cross people is one. Think how far short we come—any of us—from understanding one another! And still, we ridicule the man who declares he is misunderstood. But after all—it’s true. Tremendously true. No one is under-

stood. No man *can* be. There's so much of him that can't be told."

Both paused in their walk and he leaned against the veranda post, with narrowed eyes on the hills. When he spoke again, it was almost as if for the moment he had forgotten her presence. "Oh, we can't express it—that's all. *We* can't utter it—not a thousandth part. We haven't channels enough—"

"So many thoughts come crowding—fighting—" She was so eager to respond, her words rushed headlong, stumbling. "Sometimes they seem to be like a torch in the brain. It *is* like fire ain't it, when the mind gets awake?"

"Why, you're a poet, Miss Lida."

"Oh, no!" she denied, earnestly. "I've never written a line."

"That is of no consequence. You are a poet, notwithstanding."

This statement, of all the conversation, was what returned to her afterward.

He relapsed again into his absent mood, his eyes fixed upon the mountains. "What do they say, Miss Lida, when you try to tell them about it—other folks, who don't understand, I mean?"

She could not tell whether he dallied with the idea, in amusement, or whether the question sprang from a deeper source.

"They say I'm queer!"

He laughed. "They always do. That is the

penalty. I, too, am counted an erratic, even a misanthrope."

He called to her every day, after that. Now it was to point out how colorful the mountains were, despite their nakedness. The brownest hills, he declared, were actually palpitating with myriad fruity tints. Once, on a huge, mottled afternoon of sun and shadow, she had to come running to his sudden cry of delight, that was as eager and excited as a boy's.

"Look, Miss Lida—look! Didn't I tell you this would be the most wonderful day of all? See! On the mountains—even with the sun in hiding, those monster splashes of gold!"

The sky was a pageant of changing hues. Under its scurrying greys and blues the whole landscape ran rivers of alternate black and gold. "See over there—high up on that brown mountain, the great lake of sunshine; and down there, too—right where the shadow is thickest—a whole fling of dazzling white. Did you ever see such whiteness? Like a calcium—ha, ha! That's it. As if some unseen hand turned a spotlight on the scene, suddenly."

Again, on a rare morning, he made her sit beside him on the veranda, after she had brought his blankets and propped him up with cushions. It was such a day as comes perhaps once in an entire winter, extravagantly sunny, with a radiance in the air, like spring. Below them in its

clean brown valley, the little village, with clear-cut, flashing roofs, shone like a diamond.

"You and your mother will spoil me, Miss Lida. You are too kind to a great lazy brute who does nothing but lounge about all day in the sun."

"You—mustn't feel that way about it," she half stammered. She could not yet trust herself to look at him fully, when she was near him. He had the luminous, half-blinding quality possessed by some persons—the charm that forbids close scrutiny of mere flesh and blood.

Yet, without seeing directly, she became intensely aware of how his illness had wasted him; how pitifully thin his wrists were, and how the knuckles of his hands shone, white and prominent, through the transparent skin. The sight of his coat sagging in at the shoulders smote her with a quick pang. She had not known that his frame was so gaunt.

Suddenly the maternal instinct, which sleeps in the breast of every woman, sprang to life in Lida. Something gripped her heart, like pain.

"He must get well—he *must* get well."

She found herself staring, fascinated, upon the radiant hair of his childhood that had never darkened. He was not looking, and in the daring of the moment, she trusted herself to study his features closely. His mouth was fuller than she had thought; intensely human, with a fine

quiver about it, half of sympathy, half of humor—an irresistible mobility. Her eyes lingered searchingly, yet with reverence, noting how the part of his hair ran up high into a throbbing, blue-veined whiteness of the temples.

Even as she saw it, his eyes turned, with a darting unconsciousness, and in a flash had captured hers. It was the first time she had looked fully into his eyes. Her unpreparedness held her powerless, while for a long instant his gaze absorbed hers utterly.

When at last she looked away, she could not speak. She sat staring at the mountains, that shed a marvelous new light.

Upstairs, half an hour later, she caught a swift glimpse of her reflection in the mirror and stopped short where she was, staring incredulously at the brilliant face.

"Do I look like that?" she gasped. "Do I look like *that*?"

Entering the kitchen, not long afterwards, she found her mother rushing about in a kind of panic, trying to do half a dozen things at once.

"I declare, Lida, I'm that pestered, I'm nigh crazy. I declare I don't know's we ought to have took him——"

"Why not?" the girl asked, sharply.

"I don't know—but Dr. Fanning's been here givin' me all sorts of lists an' orders—things Mr. Penfield's got to have—a swinging couch on

the piazza, brand new mattresses, more quilts, and all kinds of fancy things to eat. We just can't do it, that's all."

"But mother, we've got to do it—we can't back out, now."

"Well, we can't. It ain't the money—he'll pay for extras—he's awful generous—"

"Well, then, mother, for goodness sake—"

"It ain't that, Lida. The point is, we can't get them things up here. You know that. Everything costs so much in the mountains—nobody will bring things up here." Mrs. Bowen had the abhorrence of the country-bred for branching out. Her brain, unaccustomed to efforts along new lines, refused to accommodate the thought of the untried.

"Nonsense, mother. We can get anything we'll pay for. Just be calm and tell me what it is the doctor says Mr. Penfield's got to have."

"Oh, all kinds of city things. Porterhouse steaks, extra fruits and fancy vegetables; and I don't know what not. We'll have to send to the city for most of 'em."

*"Very well, then, send to the city. Why not? You talk as if we'd have to send to California for 'em."*

"But where'll we get this fine, new-fangled swinging couch he wants for the piazza, I'd like to know?"

"We'll get it, never you mind. We'll send at once."

"I'd like to know who'll haul the thing up here when it comes?"

"Timothy—Ray'll do it for us—see if he don't."

"I thought you said you'd never ask another favor of Timothy Ray as long as you lived."

"Did I?" Lida wondered, coolly. "I had forgotten."

"It beats me, how you've gone to the other extreme of what you used to be. I say, if folks ain't satisfied with what I've got; if they can't take my house and my table as it is—"

"Nonsense, mother! Don't keep going on like that. The point is, Mr. Penfield is used to better things and he *must* have them. If you can't look at it from any other standpoint, then get the business view. Mr. Penfield's paying more than any boarder we ever had before. We can't afford *not* to keep him—"

It was a master stroke.

"Well, Lida! To think you actually see it at last. I've been trying to pound that into you for the last five years and you wouldn't see it—not till this very minute." Mrs. Bowen took a long breath. "Well!" she capitulated, "who'll do the ordering and telephoning and all the rest of it?"

"I'll tend to everything," said Lida, promptly. "You won't be bothered with any of it."

These were the days when toil became a marvelous thing—the building of fires in early morning, the washing of dishes and all the other homely tasks had charm for her. The harder she labored, the greater grew her joy in complete self-giving.

It was while she stood one day scouring pots and pans at the kitchen table that she first heard Penfield singing. He had not touched the piano before and had never mentioned his vocal gift. She lifted her head, thrilling to the sound of his powerful baritone. Now the notes softened and deepened, again they rose in passionate crescendo. What was it he sang? Her hearing strained for the words:

“I love thee—I love but thee—  
With a love that cannot die;  
With a love that cannot die!”

Her heart seemed to stop beating with the pressure of her joy. She leaned against the window casing, suddenly faint. Then all the blood in her veins leaped and triumphed in the glory of the last:

“Till the sun grows cold  
And the stars are old—  
And the leaves of the judgment book unfold!”

She stood with a rough, black frying-pan held aloft in her hand. But she did not know it. Her entire surroundings were swept from her as if they had never been.

Every day after that he sang some snatch of song. Sometimes he sat for hours at the piano, improvising dreamily; again, in his boy's mood, he sang light airs, bubbling with merriment.

"He's getting well!" she triumphed.

Then, like a hand of fear, something closed over her heart. When he became himself, wholly himself, he would be thinking of the city. He and the doctor had discussed it many times. Lida pushed the thought from her, hugging her happiness with a fierce possession. She wanted him there with her—always—in their wonder-world, ringed with mountains. Oh, it was true. No one save herself knew how powerfully true—how every pulse and breath depended on him, how all her instincts swung to him.

Ah, it had always been at the heart of her joy—that fear, the fear that it could not last. And jealousy, too—jealousy of those unknown interests that must swallow him up. It was a horror not to be faced. She put it off, as one puts off the thought of death. She would be glad in his recovery, she told herself, glad as he was glad.

But that was before his strange, cold, despondent moods came over him. No one could understand them, least of all Lida. Bitter, devastating moods they seemed, whitening him as ice blasts whiten the fields in winter. Some days he would lie for hours without speaking to anyone; simply

staring ahead into vacancy, or closing his eyes with a grimness that seemed like resignation.

"He's tired, poor boy. He's just tired," Lida tried to tell herself. Sometimes it seemed to her he had forgotten her existence. When he rallied, she knew that the effort was forced. And the knowledge hurt.

Yet the sight of his feebleness gave a new edge to her passion. He seemed more like a boy than ever—a great, unhappy, helpless boy, lank and bony. She loved him thus; loved the bones and the lankness and all the blemishes, for such is the love of woman.

Dr. Fanning sighed over the relapse, and shook his head. He called in two other physicians, and they, likewise, shook their heads, and there was grave talk about the case, in technical terms that Lida could not comprehend. It was a calamity that stunned the girl at first. Then her love blazed high with determination. She felt lifted into a realm of superhuman strength, as if she were part of the forces that commanded.

"He shall get well—he *shall!* I'll make him tell me the thing that's troubling him. There *must* be some help for it—there *is* help for it. Whatever it is, I'll find it. If nobody else will save him, I will!"

The thing that roused Penfield to pity for her was her repeated plaint that in some way she must have been to blame.

"Perhaps you haven't had the right food, or your room wasn't warm enough——"

"Please, Miss Lida, you make me unhappy when you persist in blaming yourself. Once for all, let me assure you that it is in no way your fault."

Lida took a long breath. "Then what *is* it?" she begged. "If you don't tell me, I'll always believe it was my fault—I'll think so as long as I live."

Penfield looked then, and saw her swimming eyes. "Well, Lida—I'll tell you."

Her head went up, and every chord of her being waited.

"Lida," he began, earnestly, "why is it doctors think they can cure a man—the *whole* man, mind you—by prescribing remedies for his body? We aren't mere bodies, you see, Lida—we human beings. We're not mere flesh and muscle—there's so much *more* of us than the physical. So many elements enter into the question of a cure. How in all reason can eggs and mountain air and tonics cure a heart sorrow? Unless there's happiness at the core of us to keep our resistance high, what use are all the doctors and medicines in the world?"

She sat perfectly rigid, her widening eyes burning their prescience of what must come. She had known it, all along; her fear had told her, weeks ago.

"You—have—a sorrow?"

Her voice seemed to come from a far distance as if another than herself had spoken. It was a long time before he answered.

"Yes," he said at last, in a low voice, "yes, Lida—I have a sorrow."

She did not stir. Not even an eyelash fluttered. She stared straight at the landscape, that had suddenly turned slate-cold.

"So you see, Lida, it's not your fault. It's something you can't remedy."

She understood. He did not intend to tell her more—he thought it was enough. Fury flamed in her. She had the impatience of the savage creature, which brooks no control. The might of her jealousy and her desire gave her sudden subtlety.

"Does *she* know?" she asked, softly. "Does she know you're sick?"

The question came so gently, it seemed without affront. Penfield looked up, quickly. "Lida, you wizard, how did you guess?"

It was a pitiful attempt to revive the bantering manner of his boyish mood.

"Women always know," she answered, through stiffened lips.

Her face showed nothing; her gaze was fixed upon black, beaten hills, with roads running like scars and seams across a grief-smitten face.

Common rocks and stones stood out, with a

cruel harshness; and trees in their nakedness shrank before the wind.

He answered her question slowly. "No, Lida, she doesn't know I'm sick."

"*She don't know you're sick?*"

"No."

"*She don't know you're here?*"

"No."

"Why didn't you tell her? She ought to know." All of the dialogue seemed unreal, hideous. Surely, she must waken from this nightmare.

Penfield was speaking. "That wouldn't be manly, would it? When a woman has refused a man, he's a cad if he attempts to play upon her pity."

"That's just a man's queer notion," Lida responded. "A woman wouldn't look at it like that." She was holding her anguish by desperate control, but back in her mind was a vision of the suffering that must come.

"She's a wonderful woman, Lida—much too fine and too great for me." He did not see the quiver that crossed her face.

It was not a dream from which she would waken. It was broad daylight. She brushed her hand across her dress—it, too, was real. It was all real. She shivered.

It came to her that if she looked back, she could understand so many things—inexplicable

before. "Then you—you were fighting all that while—when you seemed to be getting well?"

"Yes, Lida, I was fighting."

"You didn't really feel—any of the cheerfulness—any of the——anything but——"

"I'm afraid not."

Then what had it all meant—the glory, the enchantment? The light that rushed from his eyes, until it poured over the world? Had she imagined everything?

*How could it have been possible?*

She asked the question that millions of women have asked before her. And like them, she was dumb before it.

"But you see," Penfield went on, "that was before hope left. I could not help reaching out to the thought that she would change her mind—until the news came about her triumphs."

"She wrote you?"

"No—she didn't write. We haven't corresponded for months."

"But you heard——"

"The newspapers were full of it," he said in a voice grown suddenly brittle. Lida looked up quickly, and saw that his hard feeling was not for her. She waited. "An overwhelming success," Penfield continued, "the envy of many another singer. You see, Lida—" his tone

changed again—"she has a wonderful career, so precious to her that she would never give it up for so humble a thing as—marriage."

"Wouldn't give it up?" she flashed. "Wouldn't give it up for y—for—" Words failed her.

"She couldn't, Lida. Some women are made that way. She has a passion for her work—a mania. Nothing could divide that devotion."

"And she's—she's in New York, now?"

"Yes—she's there now. I think—" He paused. "I think that's why I dreaded going back, when she was there and everything so different. You can imagine—" His head fell back on the cushion and a silence, like winter, fell upon him.

It was all coming to her now—how she had seen him reading papers and clippings so often, with an intense look on his face. So that was what it had meant—he had been keeping track of her; eating his heart out over her triumphs, because each one widened the gulf between them. She knew where he kept a whole sheaf of clippings; she had passed them over indifferently, day after day when she dusted his things, never suspecting—

Penfield did not speak again and Lida understood. She rose unsteadily, reaching for the veranda railing, for all the space about her was dizzy. She did not go to the kitchen, as was her wont, but straight to her miserable little room,

where she locked herself in. For an hour she remained there, sitting on the edge of the uncomfortable bed, with hands pressed hard against her temples, not stirring nor uttering a sound. Voices called to her and someone knocked on her door.

"I can't come, Jimmy. I can't get dinner. Tell mother I have a headache." She seemed to be speaking to someone on another planet. After awhile the knocking ceased.

It came to her suddenly—the desire to see those clippings. Penfield was having dinner served to him now, down in the sitting-room—she would have ample time. She opened the door of his room and went in, with that feeling of half reverence, half fear, which always came to her when she found herself in this sanctuary. There, on the lower shelf of his desk was the folio, with clippings bulging from it. Reaching, she attempted to remove a few of the smaller ones, but they stuck. She gave a little pull and they yielded. A photograph fell out. Lida, on her knees, grasped the picture, devouring every feature of that other woman's likeness. A name was written on the back—"Natalie." The date was six months back.

"She shan't have him—she shan't!" All the universe was red with hate, ferocious with it.

She was reading the clippings now, that told of

the singer's triumphs, and had all of the name, with the address on Riverside Drive.

A voice commenced whispering to her: "She doesn't know he's here. She doesn't even know he's sick—think of it! If she knew, as *you* know—"

Lida strove to deafen that voice, but it persisted. "If she knew, as *you* know!"

She saw her duty, sharp and relentless, and writhed before it.

But there was only one way to save him.

All that night, an angel and a devil raged in her. It was such a fight as comes to every human being, in some guise, once in a lifetime, the inevitable conflict between the divine and the mortal, marking an epoch in evolution. And when the dawn came, she had conquered; she had taken the upward step.

She knew now—that other had been the lesser love. This was love; this great emotion, so deep, so high, so kindled, that it yearned to give itself wholly; was glad to suffer, to trample its own desires; to deprive itself utterly, for the good of the beloved.

"It is what mothers feel," she said; "It is what mothers feel!"

Now that she had made up her mind, there was no hesitation and no turning back. A train went in the morning, a little after nine. She would rise early and arrange everything. She had

decided what to do and nothing could stop her now.

Lida marvelled at the ease with which all her plans fell into place. She had almost a feeling of the supernatural, as if unseen powers moved and shaped every little circumstance to meet the one supreme and burning aim. It was just as she started on her errand that her mother came down from the invalid's room, where she had left a tray. She was holding a ring in her hand, and her face had a pitying look. Lida recognized at once the signet ring that Penfield always wore on his little finger.

"It slipped off," said Mrs. Bowen, shaking her head. "His fingers is gettin' thinner an' thinner. He didn't seem to care, somehow, when it fell off that way, by his plate. He just said, 'Give it to Lida!' That's what he said, and his voice was so weak and low like—'Tell Lida to keep it for me!'"

All that came after belonged to the strange sweep of events that Lida will always remember as something outside of herself—an irresistible current that bore her swiftly on, free of all personal timidity or fear. She knew scarcely anything of the long cold drive to the station, although a stinging wind whipped her face and penetrated her wraps. She did not live in the present discomfort. Her mind, afire with its de-

termination, reached far ahead, straining, hoping, pushing to one goal.

Then there was the trip by train and ferry, and the swift subway ride, amid a suffocating jam of people. She had no knowledge that women stared at her plain, clumsily fitting coat, and that a group of girls giggled at her hat. Her world was an inner world, intense, seething; a world of high realities, that shut out all things less than itself.

Then the apartment building at last—tall and bewildering, with its luxurious entrance, mirror-lined; its noiseless elevators gliding up and down; its liveried flunkies that stood about the entrance.

"H'm—very sorry, Miss—but Miss Trent—h'm—is not at home."

Lida sank into a seat. "When do you think she'll be home? I've *got* to see her."

"I'm sure I can't tell you, Miss."

"Can't you find out—somehow—for me?"

It required some length of explanation to make the matter clear to Lida. At last she cried, in sheer relief "Oh, then she *is* here? She's here now? Can't I—it's awful important——"

"You might send up a note."

The man brought pencils and paper.

Lida's first note failed of its purpose. Then she knew she must be explicit. There was nothing for it but to mention Penfield's name.

The reply to that note came quickly. Miss Trent would see her at once.

Lida was aware that this woman represented a world of which the mountains knew little or nothing, yet she was unprepared for the actual sight of Natalie Trent's loveliness.

The girl stood for a moment, in speechless, blinking embarrassment, like one who has come too suddenly into a strong light.

"You say you have a message from Mr. Penfield?"

Yes—she was like her picture, even more beautiful. Lida had never before seen such self-possession, such exquisite motions of head and hands.

The girl went straight to the core of her subject.

"Yes," she replied bluntly. "He's awful sick. He's been sick about two months—maybe more. He's at our house, in the mountains."

"Do you know what the trouble is?"

Miss Trent's composure did not yield. Her voice had no tremor in it. She crossed the room slowly and touched an electric button near a soft blue hanging. "You must have something hot to drink," she said, "I'm sure you must be cold after your long journey."

"Thanks," said Lida, absently. "No, we don't know what the trouble is. The doctor can't tell."

Then, with her dreadful bluntness: "But we all think now that he's dying."

Miss Trent's hand was poised in removal from the summoning button. She turned, with her head up, while her hand remained in that attitude for a moment. Indeed, her whole body had suddenly grown rigid.

She looked at Lida strangely. Just at the instant, a maid appeared.

"Please serve tea for two, Mary," she murmured.

She moved forward, dazedly. "Did you say *dying?* I'm sure you can't mean what you say." Then she sank upon a chair as if all power of support had left her limbs.

"Yes, I do mean it," insisted Lida. She began fumbling in her purse. "Here's his ring." Her voice shook in its eagerness. "It slipped off his finger this morning."

The woman reached without a word and took the little trinket. On the instant the ring touched her fingers all barriers of control gave way.

"Dick—Oh, Dick!"

She stood up, then, with all pretense gone. "Will you take me to him?" she begged of Lida. "Now—at once."

Penfield was lying on the couch before the fire, when the two women reached the house. Lida stood without, while the other went forward into his presence.

Silence—then the thrill of her low cry: “Dick—I’ve come, dear,—I’ve come!”

“Natalie—if I’m dreaming this—if I wake and find it’s all a cheat—good God!”

It was a miracle the physicians gave up hope of understanding. How a man who seemed to be dying could have rallied so that he went about the house, singing—Lida was in the kitchen when she first heard it—his voice, in that song. She dropped her work and put her hand against her breast as if someone had stabbed her. Then she reached and took her shawl from its peg and ran out of the house, like a maddened creature, away from the passion of that voice which thrilled her very soul with its beautiful confession that was not meant for her—

*“I love thee, I love thee, with a love that shall not die!”*

She ran on, pressing her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out the vision of that other woman, bending above him as he sang:

*“—Love thee—Love but thee—”*

The voice pursued her, soaring, triumphing:  
*“Till the sun grows cold, and the stars are old—”*

Oh, would she never get beyond the reach of it, and the anguish?

“But he’s saved—he’s saved!” she kept sobbing, over and over.

As she went up the storm-shaken hill, she exulted in the furious crimson of the west.



## **THE MAKING OF A MAN**

**"See this soul of ours!  
How it strives weakly in the child, is loosed  
In manhood."**



## THE MAKING OF A MAN

**W**HEN Frank Hathaway went home for vacation at the end of his first year at Yale, he felt a keen curiosity to know how far studiousness and strength of purpose had dominated romance in him. For a year he had renounced all thought of girls, driving himself to study not through passion for it, but by sheer determination to meet his father's high ideal of him, his father's big plans for his future.

It had been the longest period of discipline he had ever known. Beginning with his high school days, girls and studies had gone blithely together, with the result that the latter had suffered. At Andover, battling with preparatory work, he had gained resistance, but his brain was still a riot of dreams in which fair faces figured no less than the large ambitions.

Here at home, with the summer before him, and the goad of study removed, would he revert to his earlier impressionable state? It took him just a week to decide. In that time, he had called on all the old girls who had at one time or another appealed to him, and had found that in some mysterious way, the edge had gone from

his interest. After all, the big things would dominate.

She was no prettier than other comely girls in this simple, prosaic New England town—maybe not so pretty. But she was different—tantalizingly different. There was nothing provincial about Lucille Harden.

Although the Harden family had moved to town but two months ago, she had already drawn a train of admirers. Confident, chic and self-possessed, with that egoism which of itself furnishes a certain glamour, it was inevitable that she should attract "the boys" while a bewildered sisterhood looked on and marveled at the secret of her popularity.

The fact that she seemed a trifle older than Frank failed to exert the dampening effect customary with him in the face of such contingency. Indeed, it gave to her the teasing charm, the elusive quality, of the unattainable.

"Oh, well," Frank excused himself, after his third call in one week, "a fellow's got to have the *capacity* for it, or he's no good. Those prigs at college who pretend they're superior to it—let 'em plug away for all I care. There's no use being a fossil, anyway."

Spurred by his rivals, Frank, by force of habit, fought the stronger fight, with result that by the time vacation was half over, the other fellows

had given way before Lucille's manifest preference for him.

He was more than a good-looking boy; tall, straight and strongly built, with a face the sensitiveness of which was balanced by a rugged promise in chin and forehead. The eyes, a dark and flashing grey, showed abundant enthusiasm and a still unspoiled idealism.

Of course, his attention to Lucille could mean nothing serious—it was simply a case of "rushing" another girl. Even had he wished, no thought of the permanent was possible now, for were there not years of effort and growth ahead—years hedged about by inflexible plans?

Besides, Lucille had no such thought—he was sure of that. For all their comradeship, she kept him at a distance; luring him, yet somehow forbidding advance.

September had come again, college was two weeks off, and affairs were still in this harmless, pleasantly indefinite state. Frank in his heart was glad to have it so. He was even conscious of relief one afternoon when, on approaching Lucille's house through the maple-shaded street, he realized how the tang of autumn air, sharp and sweet in his lungs, brought with it a shock of renewed ambition, a real yearning for the spur of college life.

His growth had been even greater than he supposed. He was a man now—a man with a

will and an aim. Some day, he would surprise Dad with the splendor of his achievements. He would be one of the big men—the really big men.

It would be politics—there was no doubt of that. For it was there, in that field, that clean manhood was most needed. That was what the colleges were trying to hammer into the fellows to-day and they were right. He would go in for reform, he would wipe out the bosses.

As if in swift prevision a vivid picture flashed. He saw himself on the platform of a huge amphitheatre, facing a frenzied, handkerchief-waving multitude—

Something jolted him back to the present—the sight of familiar terrace steps, directly under his down-bent eyes. He looked quickly—then every trace of the vision fled. On the veranda with Lucille and bending over her with a proprietary air, was a stranger, a man more mature than himself.

He was a well-built, prepossessing chap with the same look of *savoir faire* that made Lucille so different from the other girls.

She turned, smiling in open, careless comradeship. "Hello Frank—Come on up. How are you?"

There was bravado, rather than confidence, in his prompt reply: "Oh, pretty kippy for an old man. How're you?"

"Frank, I want you to know Norman Howe. You remember I've spoken of him before."

There was no reason for discomfiture on the part of the New Englander. Tanned, healthily alert, brilliant-eyed, he had a far more positive personality than the other man. But he did not know it. There was only one thing he knew at this moment—and he felt it through all the length of his muscular, sensitively knit frame—that he was somehow at a disadvantage.

Heresbefore, the knowledge that his father, a leader in the shoe industry, was a power to be reckoned with in this community, had given him a sustaining confidence equal to any situation. But in this hour, that knowledge counted not at all.

Above and beyond it the undeniable fact stood out—that this father was of homespun fibre and disdained the polishing processes.

Lucille's eyes had a spark he had never seen in them before. She wore a sheer white dress, captivatingly made, and through the filmy stuff her neck and arms had the hue of bisque. She showed an arch vivacity in the presence of this man such as she had not in all their friendship shown to Frank.

He, gradually humping himself into a grouchy figure against the veranda post, mentally denounced the type of paternal brain which can hold out one idea at a time. All this blamed Puri-

tanical rot!—Hathaway senior would have dismissed as “worldly nonsense” the very advantages Norman Howe possessed.

The latter was evidently expected to stay for tea. Frank took himself off betimes, refusing somewhat grimly Lucille’s urgent invitation that he remain.

All that evening he nursed his hurt. The next day he determined not to go near her house until just before leaving for Yale. But he went that very evening. Norman Howe was already there. He was no kid, to give way good-naturedly for another—that was evident. Well then, he, Frank Hathaway, was no kid either, to be driven off, even by a fellow older than himself.

Three times that week he tried it, his fighting spirit wholly roused. And invariably he encountered his cheerful, self-possessed, calmly determined rival.

Hate—that was all the boy was conscious of for days. Hate so black, so different from anything he had ever felt before, that at first he was appalled by the brutal force of it. Then from the very heart of this hate there sprang without warning a strange emotion, golden as melody. The sweetness and the pang of it frightened, bewildered him. But it did not conquer the hate.

That grew with every hour, until resolve swept everything before it. He went straight to her home and found her alone.

"We might as well be frank with each other, Lucille. What does it all mean?"

She turned innocent eyes, liquid as a child's, upon him. "What does—what all mean?"

"You know perfectly. I didn't suppose—anybody could come between us like that."

"Why Frank, there's no reason why Norman shouldn't come, is there?"

"There isn't?" With this explosive, a dart of red lit the tan of his cheek. "What did you suppose it meant then—our going together all summer and everything?"

"Why, I hadn't the slightest idea that you meant anything as serious as—as—"'

The unspoken word seemed to project itself with startling suddenness and then to hover, uncertain and afraid. Frank felt it as a presence, exquisite, but strange and fearful.

"Marriage." The shock of saying it aloud brought him back abruptly to the actual. He sat bolt upright, staring ahead in quick dismay.

"I've got to be honest with you there, Lucille. I'm not ready yet—there must be work and study, lots of it, before I'm worthy. But I shall be—and if we could have an understanding—" He floundered, aware that in some way he was hurting his cause.

Lucille's face was turned away. "Norman,"

she said reflectively, "is ready to marry now. He doesn't want to wait—he won't wait."

"*Won't* wait?"

Somewhere, deep in his being, a chord that had never been struck twanged savagely. "Then you've talked it over already—you've given him the right—"

"No, Frank. I've given him no right—yet."

"Yet. But you intend to."

"I don't know."

He felt the sweat break out upon his forehead. "I'm ready to marry as soon as he is—I wouldn't wait a week if there was any chance for me. That's what I've got to know—if there *is* a chance."

She was silent a moment. Then, "I promised Norman I'd give him a final answer this evening. To-night will decide everything."

Voice left him, while he felt the rising in him of that fearful hate. After a time he spoke. "That doesn't answer my question—if there's any chance for me."

To his astonishment, she came toward him impulsively and both hands brushed his shoulders in a swift caress. "I do like you, Frank—I do like you. But—I like Norman too."

She withdrew her hands as quickly as she had touched him, while he stood rigid, incapable in that instant of thought or speech. Then, at his blind approach, "No, Frank—not yet. After to-

night, maybe. I don't know. But you must go now—you must!"

The street was too public to share the miracle that surged in him. A patch of woods lay in his homeward way, if he chose to cut across, and he plunged into it, stripping through the underbush that showered leaves already turning to autumn scarlet.

Gaining the path, he strode swiftly with his head thrown back and his eyes half closed, the touch of her hands still exquisite upon his shoulders. Mellow regions in his soul were bursting, flowering gates of enchantment swung wide.

Marriage, the remote, the wonderful, the goal toward which his highest dreams had yearned; the sacred thing that his thoughts had always touched with reverence fine as any woman's,—marriage might be soon.

Might be? *Must* be!

All at once he knew it, in every atom of his being. Something had hold of him—something bigger and deeper and stronger than himself; a huge emotion, a force outside of him that shook him and controlled him . . .

He knew—its roots ran back into the ages. It was what other men felt—millions of them, centuries back, farther than he could think—this rage for possession, ferocious, beautiful—he could have shouted with joy of it!

There was just one thing in all the world he

wanted. One woman he would win. No power in the universe could keep her from him.

He looked up now and saw how all the woods had wakened, how every object sprang sharp and clear against his sight, magnified intensely in the burning air. Even the gnats in the sun were a swarm of jewels—everything was tremendously alive.

It was useless to tell himself that evening that he must wait—that not till to-morrow could he know her answer. Already, by half past seven, his torment had driven him to the neighborhood where she lived. By eight, ambushed in shadows thrown by the corner arc light, he was pacing the street directly opposite the house, sight and hearing focussed, thought, will and breathing strained to one end. As if by his presence, by the sheer might of his resolve, he could beat back the other—could compel events to hold and keep her for himself . . .

But he was coming—that other. His footsteps sounded, quick and confident, far up the street. Frank could not have mistaken them amid a hundred. Now he was turning into the path. The door bell sounded, then Lucille's voice in laughing welcome.

They went indoors where the lamp shone invitingly, and presently there was music.

It was too much for the boy's endurance. He must seek another street, at least until Lucille

had stopped singing. Stamping and raging he walked three times around the block and when at last he returned to his post, he heard them talking on the veranda. At intervals, the girl's laugh sounded low and tantalizing.

For what seemed an interminable time, Frank lingered in the palpitating darkness that ached with his suspense. At last he heard their voices in a distinct "Good-night."

Frank waited only until the departing one was halfway down the street. In a flash he was across the road and up the path toward the veranda.

The screen door was just about to close upon her, the white of her dress like moon-radiance in the shadows.

"Lucille!"

"Why Frank—how you frightened me!"

"It's just that I've got to know, that's all. I've got to know now—I couldn't wait."

She opened the screen door softly, she came out and sat down, quietly, upon the baluster. "Norman is going away to-morrow," she said.

"You mean—Oh, Lucille!"

Her hands, like magnolias, flowered toward him out of the dusk. "I didn't accept him, Frank."

He sank forward where she sat. "Lucille!" he gasped. "Oh—oh!"

He knew now it had been inevitable. It was what he had always wanted, always intended,

even when he planned most faithfully those greater things.

*Greater?*

The might of all the universe focussed here.

## II.

"Frank, you're so nervous. What *is* the matter?"

"Nothing," he lied, wielding the whisk broom feverishly as he got ready to go down for dinner. "I'm just happy, I guess. The excitement, New York and all——" Then he laughed. "You forget, Lucille, I'm only a rube."

He was wondering how he should tell her—how he should begin. The mere thought of it made him gasp. Still dizzy from the whirlwind of events that had swept him on in defiance of father, family, friends, till it landed him here in New York two weeks ago with a wife to support, it seemed to him he would never get his breath again. Each day but increased the bewildering momentum.

"A rube!" She rebuked him, patting her hair and adjusting her combs at the mirror, "Nonsense! The son of Franklin Hathaway a rube! Don't you say it, Frank, even in fun. I simply won't listen to it."

He laughed again, in the jerky unnatural way she noticed. "All right, I won't say it if it plagues

you. But it's true, just the same. A fellow feels it the moment he sets foot on Manhattan soil."

"Manhattan asphalt and cobblestones, you mean!"

But he did not seem to hear. He was diving into his vest pockets, shuffling letters and telegrams, seized by a quick and tense abstraction. How could he tell her, without seeming a brute? If she would only help him by showing some understanding of the situation! But she didn't seem to be able to take the question of money seriously. Her unawareness was a thing that appalled him more and more. And yet he had been strictly honest with her. He had explained to her, in so many words: "Dad's out of it, Lucille—I've got to go it alone." And she had been willing—perfectly willing to share the uncertainty of the future with him. She had seemed to understand.

Yet it was she who, familiar with the city, had selected this expensive apartment hotel, with elevators, mirrored halls and dining rooms, where small white tables held softly shaded candles. Once established within its walls, economy had been impossible. Yet every hour of it brought him nearer the inevitable—he was like a man at the edge of a crater.

"Come on, Frank dear. I'm ready. We've got to be early if we expect to make the theatre."

"The theatre!" He paused, blank-faced.

"Blamed if I didn't forget it Lucille—I didn't get tickets. Do forgive me, dearest."

"Oh, but Frank, I've been looking forward to it so! Can't we go somewhere else then? Some other theatre will do."

After all, he was the one at fault, to hesitate a second. What would a wife on her honeymoon expect, if not such pleasure?

"Sure thing, dearest. We'll go right down after dinner and see what we can find."

At table, he tried to steady his thoughts in the cheerful glow of the candles. But the inner panic shook him. Existence was become a vortex, where plan and purpose did not count; where faculties that once belonged to him seemed to have splintered and shredded in the strength of the whirl.

"Why don't you eat?" she asked him. "You've scarcely touched anything."

"I had a big lunch downtown—I guess that's the reason." He had eaten nothing since breakfast.

"Do eat your dessert, at least."

But he was rolling a cigarette.

"Frank, you didn't smoke like that at home. You didn't smoke at all, did you?"

"Couldn't at college. But I don't have to train for any track meets now. Don't worry—it calms me and I've got to have it."

A fine drizzle was falling when they got out

into the street. She wore a theatre wrap of delicate grey, white-lined, and a hat with pale blue plumes. Frank looked at her and a wave of helplessness went over him.

He felt her unspoken expectation and thrilled with fear. *Now he would have to tell her.*

"Taxis all taken, sir," said the man, at the door, as they paused. "Can get one if you wait, sir."

"That means ten minutes," said Lucille. The subway entrance yawned but a half block away.

"Come on Frank, it's so late now we'll miss everything if we wait. Might as well take the subway, it's only two stations down. You have your umbrella."

He breathed again, yet hated himself that he did. After all, he had been a boor and a brute. He had not given her a hundredth part as much as she had a right to expect.

In the subway crowd, her theatre apparel seemed out of place. A greasy-looking man stepped on her skirt, a fat woman jammed her parcels against the dainty coat. It was coming to Frank, and more, that a person needed money to live at all in New York. In a small town, you simply didn't notice. But here, in the metropolis, a hundred little things humiliated you to the dust. The dash and slam of the train banged it into him at every station.

The theatre district, with its crush of cabs and

automobiles, its foyers flowering with the fashionably dressed, did not serve to increase his comfort. What a difference it made to be transplanted from one's native heath! Both he and Lucille had suffered by the process. His wife's finery, for all its daintiness, was inexpensive in appearance. Beside the smartly gowned woman at her right, she seemed almost flimsily dressed.

The drizzle had grown to a heavy rain by the time the theatre was out, and there was nothing for it but a taxicab home. Sitting beside her, he felt his temples tightening with the dread of what must come. Had she looked, she could have seen how the desperate pulse showed in his cheek, grown lean in an hour. But she was talking of the play.

How could he have anticipated this calamity? He kept asking it, despairingly, through all the swift ride home. Who would have known that two hundred dollars—the only money that was his when he quarreled with his father—wouldn't do to live on for a few weeks while he went out and hustled for a job? Two hundred dollars in New York! It had melted even while he was looking at it.

Lucille ran into the apartment while he stood outside and paid the chauffeur. When he put his limp purse back into his pocket, it contained exactly one dollar and a quarter.

But even now he could not tell Lucille. Leav-

ing her on the pretense of having letters to post, he flung out into the street, bending his head and his umbrella to the driving rain.

Where he was going he didn't know. But he had to have room to think.

For half an hour he walked in the rain. And his panic only grew. Only that morning he had read in a newspaper how a chap in just the same predicament killed himself rather than tell his wife. But he was a fool. Anybody with reasoning powers and common sense—

"I've got to fight it out, that's all. Just a little money to tide over this crisis—every man, sometime in his life, has to draw on his friends."

He found a telegraph office and sent a night despatch. Bob Waring, his best friend, his chum, couldn't help but respond. But shame filled him as he wrote, for he had quarreled with Bob, had defied him even as he had defied the others.

Well, there was no hope for it. What choice did he have, in the grip of this necessity?

"It means just one thing—that I've got to make good. I'm up against it now, but it's just the spur I need. All of it's good for me. I'll show them all yet—I'll *show 'em!*"

To-morrow he would launch forth upon his quest, bolder, more passionately determined than ever. Somewhere, in this hustling city, there was work for him—he knew it in his bones. He simply couldn't miss it.

Lucille, instead of greeting his return with anxious questions, met him with flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes. She had been reading newspapers in his absence.

"Look Frank—here's another story about us, a big one this time—and they've got a fine picture of me."

Coming home from town that afternoon he had read the highly colored, sensational account and had intended to hide the sheet so she couldn't get hold of it. It had struck him with peculiar force from the first that she should show pleasure over these accounts. With a man's instinctive hatred of notoriety, he had wanted to buy up every paper and make a bonfire of the lot.

"Who in thunder could have given them your picture, Lucille? I can't see how any friend of yours could have been so treacherous."

"Why Frank, it's nothing to be grouchy over," she pouted.

"Well, it's nothing to be proud of, either. It doesn't prove that we're prominent at all—it simply means that elopements always make good copy for the papers. The elopement of a waitress and a teamster would serve as well."

But her pleasure was not diminished nor her interest lessened. She went on reading, with dimpling cheeks. Suddenly she laughed outright. "But they've got it all wrong, Frank—just think! They say: 'Young pair penniless in New York—

wealthy father refuses to help.' Imagine—*penniless!*"

Now was his chance. He stood staring at her, while his ears rang.

"Well, you know Lucille—we haven't very much." His voice had a far away sound.

"Listen to this Frank—'Young Benedict struggles to get a job' The idea! As if you with your college training and everything would ever have to struggle! Why, you're eligible for any kind of a splendid place, aren't you, Frank?"

"You bet I am, and I'm going to get it. But look here, Lucille—college education doesn't count, as far as that goes—unless you've specialized. Business training's the thing. And I haven't had it."

"But then your father's name would certainly help you."

He flushed warmly. "I'm not depending on father's name. If I can't do it alone, it won't be done."

The hurt of his father's unforgiveness was still raw in his heart; it amazed him that the poignancy of it could so persist, in the midst of his joy.

Lucille gave a little impatient sigh. "Dear me —let's not get on that subject—it makes you so blue." As if she really couldn't understand just why it should.

Her indifference to his suffering in this was

something he had not fathomed yet. She had not seemed to comprehend the quality of his grief, the reason for it; had shown a lightness for which he was not at all prepared.

He had the same feeling about this lack in her that he had had when she reveled in the news accounts of their love affair and elopement. She had even watched for these notices, asking him each day "if there was anything more." He had tried to shut his eyes to the fact. Girls were so different, of course. Their ideas—

Yet he remembered that his sister was not like that. She hated notoriety just as he did. The more he thought of it, the more it troubled him.

He awakened in the night with the consciousness of a weight upon his brain and the vague memory that somewhere, deep down, his love had received a wound. Then another memory bore upon him, strong, imperative, extinguishing the first. He must find work at once. Something—anything. To-morrow he must get it. Not might. but *must*.

### III.

"I've got a job!" he cried jubilantly, two days later. "Salary not so big at first, but it will grow. It's night work, dear, on a newspaper. I'll be up till after midnight—"

"Night work?" Lucille repeated in dismay. "I'll have to be here all alone."

"I'm afraid so, dear. You see, it's a morning paper—"

"Why, I shouldn't think of taking it, Frank."

He wheeled, looking hard at her, as if to be certain he had heard aright. "Wouldn't *take* it? Why, I've got to, Lucille. It's all there is. We can't starve."

The thing his desperation had not yet nerved him to do, her unexpected and unreasonable opposition jerked out of him.

"Starve? Why, Frank Hathaway, what do you mean?"

Now that it was out, he threw away all reserve. "I mean that the newspaper story was right. We're penniless. We've been penniless from the first."

"Penniless, with Franklin Hathaway for a father?"

"Look here, Lucille. Don't you understand? Dad's out of it. We've got to reckon as if he didn't exist."

He found himself gazing fixedly at her face, which was changing in an incredible way. He had never seen a look upon it just like that.

"Don't say I deceived you, Lucille, because I didn't. I was straight with you from the first."

"It isn't that," she said at last. "That's not what I'm thinking."

"But you look somehow as if you blame me."

"Of course I blame you."

"For what?" he demanded.

She stared at him deliberately before replying.  
"Why, to think you'd take a job like that and be  
willing to leave me here alone all night rather  
than write to your father."

It was his turn now to stare. "Good Lord,  
Lucille—you don't expect me to wheedle him—  
I've got some pride and a grain of manliness,  
let's hope."

"Manliness! Fiddlesticks! What do you care?  
What you want is the money."

He looked at her, doubting his hearing. Again  
he felt the shrinking, the sense of misgiving.

"I could do it," she went on, nodding her head  
with decision. "If you've got the right stuff in  
you, Frank Hathaway, you'll bring your father  
round. I'd think a long time before I'd take a job  
like that, with such a father back of me."

Her face, which a moment before had been  
girlishly innocent, seemed to have taken on a  
strange maturity. Something that suggested  
shrewdness looked out of it.

"I've got to take the job, Lucille. It's out of  
the question to think of anything else. Listen,  
dear. It sounds dreadful, I know. But we've got  
to cut our expenses right away. We've got to  
move to a neighborhood where the rents are  
lower and keep house in an economical way——"

"Keep house? You mean I'd have to do the work?"

"I'm afraid so, dear. But you see——"

"No, sir! I won't live in a pinched-up, miserly way. Not while you've got a father that could help you if you'd say the word. I'll not ruin my hands and eyes over a kitchen range. It's abominable of you to ask me."

All the color went out of his face, leaving it a ghastly tan. Out of this setting his eyes shone strangely. He seemed incapable of speech, but his chin set itself stubbornly.

"If you care enough for your wife, you'll write to your father. You'll do it now. Come, Frank"—her tone dropped to the persuasive—"sit right down now and do it. Do it for me."

"No!" he was out of his seat like a shot. The shock of his emotion was electricity charging the air.

"You won't do it for me? You'll let me suffer first? Very well. Do you call that manly?"

He jammed his hands in his pockets and turned to the window, where he stood breathing hard.

"If you don't want to do housework," he said at last, "we'll board. But it can't be in a place like this. Oh, Lucille, don't make it so hard for me. It's hard enough as it is. I'm willing to make any sort of sacrifice—I'll work like a dog at anything. But I can't write my father."

Her sullenness lasted all the next day and the next. The day after that they moved. Her mood changed, only to be replaced by sneering contempt. The quality of the tablecloth and napkins she condemned. The food she barely touched. Their room, she said, wasn't fit for a servant.

It was coming to him more and more that she was alien to him. This girl whom he had married, whom he had thought to love as another part of himself, was in reality a stranger. What necromancy had it been that had seemed to fuse two beings for a space, only to separate them wider than ever? How was it possible that the fusing could be wrought and unwrought so swiftly, so relentlessly?

Returning one night later than usual, he realized as never before how intensely he wanted a home to go to—a home made up of sympathy and understanding. The day had been exacting; he was a green "cub" in the newspaper game, and he had been "called down" by the editor and it had hurt. He wanted now to wipe it all from his mind by influences positively sweet and encouraging.

He was feeling this when he opened the door to find Lucille's mother sitting up with his wife. His greetings of startled welcome were cut short by the cold, set look on the face of Mrs. Harden. He saw the same contempt upon it that had

grown familiar to him on the face of Lucille.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked, after a moment of astonished silence.

"*What is the matter?*" Mrs. Harden repeated it after him, deliberately, while her eyes measured him. "You can ask it, Frank Hathaway, when you've brought my daughter to this?"

Frank sat down and brushed a quick hand across his forehead. Were the troubles of the day to be supplemented by troubles of another kind? His brain seemed to blur an instant; then out of the blur her voice, the mother's, sounded:

"So this is the way you treat my daughter. Bringing her to this wretched boarding-place, depriving her of pleasure, forcing her to all sorts of mean economies, and, to cap the climax, leaving her alone all night—."

"But you must listen, Mrs. Harden! It isn't my choice. It's my work—it's what I make a living by—"

"A pretty way to do it, I must say. No wonder the poor child sent for me."

"She sent for you?"

"She did. And I intend to stay and see this matter through. It's evident that some sort of a protector is needed in *this* home."

"If you don't call it protecting a wife to go out and hustle for a living—" he flashed hotly.

"It's just as easy to call it work, I suppose, as anything else," she cut him short.

She only smiled, in a knowing, hateful way. What in the world was she driving at? He sat dazed, indignant, wondering what the feminine mind could further produce.

"You say it's business that keeps you up. How do we know?"

"Good Heavens!" he said, "You surely can't doubt—"

"What else can we think, when you come home with liquor on your breath?"

"Liquor! I never touch it—" Then he remembered. He had, truly enough, taken one glass of beer to-night with Gillings, of *The Post*. The latter had treated him to dinner. "I did have a glass to-night," he corrected himself, quietly. "That sometimes happens, in work like mine. But it isn't my habit."

Mrs. Harden sneered. "A fine chance we have of knowing your habits, Frank Hathaway."

He controlled himself with effort. "Lucille," he asked, turning to her, "do you mean to say you've doubted, too?"

She looked at him squarely. "I know just one thing—if a man really loves his wife he'll sacrifice his pride for her, if necessary. And you wouldn't do that for me."

So that was it—that was the root of it all. It was their taunt during all the wretched week that followed. Frank stood it as best he could, until one night, in trying to get home early, he

took a chance, missed a "story," and lost his job. The next day, with every nerve in him protesting, he wrote a long letter to his father.

Fully a week passed before the answer came. The three were at breakfast when a registered letter was brought in, and Frank, opening the envelope while they watched, handed it to Lucille the moment he had seen the contents.

He might have known his father. Within a folded sheet of paper, perfectly blank, lay a fifty-dollar bill. Not a word, not a sign.

Leaving the table hastily on the plea that he was all ready for an appointment, he hurried away. When he reached the subway he discovered he had left his change in another suit of clothes.

Lucille and her mother had left the table by the time he returned to the house. Passing directly upstairs, he saw through the old-fashioned glass-paned doors that they were in the front room, talking earnestly. Thinking not to disturb them, he went quietly to his own room, just back of theirs, and thence to the dressing closet that separated the two. In reaching for his suit a pasteboard box fell rattling. Thinking that they would not understand the noise, he went forward to the doorway to explain his return.

These doors, like the others, were glass-paned, and partially draped. They were slightly

ajar, and Mrs. Harden's words came to him clearly:

"I did think if we went to a little town, where there was a chance for social life, there'd be some really eligible man that you could get. And here we've got a college kid, who hasn't even gumption enough to make his father support you, much less get a decent job himself."

And Lucille replied:

"Well, mother, it was your idea, you know. I was never crazy about Frank. You kept saying that with the Hathaway family back of me—"

Frank, as if warding off a blow, stepped quickly back into the shadow. But something held him spellbound. He found himself staring at them through the pane, horrified, yet fascinated, as one who watches a grim yet inevitable crisis in a play.

"Now, Lucille, if that isn't like you, to blame it all on me. Has anyone in this family done anything but blame me for everything that ever happened? I suppose you'll be saying next that I *made* you marry Frank."

Their faces, with the masks completely dropped, were as faces he had never seen before.

"You didn't make me exactly, but you kept nagging me—"

"Nagging you, Lucille! As if you weren't as anxious to marry as I was to have you."

"Well, who wouldn't be anxious to marry, with a mother always dinging it into her ears that she's got to catch a husband? You know, mother, you did taunt me again and again with being the only unmarried one."

"Well, if you were a mother, Lucille Harden, and had three daughters to marry off, you'd see what a task it was yourself. When a girl reaches the age of twenty-six, there isn't much time for foolishness. Even though you do look younger, the fact remains that that's your age. And besides, in this day when men are so scary of matrimony, what's a mother to do but make every edge cut in helping her daughter out?"

"You certainly did all you could, even to making me waste my time on that dandy, Norman Howe, who never had a thought of marriage in his life. But you insisted that if we invited him down it would spur Frank on—"

"Well, didn't it? I certainly was right in that."

The blood that had grown cold in the listener's veins yielded suddenly. It rushed in a burning tide. He did not remember anything else till he found himself bolting out of the front door, and almost running along the street.

## IV.

And was this all? All that was left of his dream? He asked it that night as he stood at his window, looking up at the stars.

All the evening he had avoided meeting his wife and her mother. He had dined in a cheap restaurant downtown and, getting home at nine, had wandered miserably about the halls and parlor, till one of the men boarders corralled him for a poker game.

It was the first time he had joined them, and he felt some misgivings when he thought of the two alone upstairs. But it was simply a choice of two evils, and he stuck, playing wretchedly, with no heart in the game. When he went upstairs at last, Lucille and her mother had retired to their room. He felt immeasurably relieved.

But he was only postponing the evil day. He must face them, he must live with them, as if nothing had happened. That must be it—pretense, deception, from this night on. Either that, or open discord—

No, he must be game. He must play his role, day after day, always—“till death do us part.”

It bore down upon him fearfully with the surrounding pressure and awe of midnight. Those words of the service had impressed him tremen-

dously, and he had repeated them with a reverent sense of their finality. It was for life.

He remembered now how, in the days when life was a lure and a promise, the stars had warmed and thrilled him, seeming to touch a region of magic in him high and beautiful—

To-night, he could not summon any feeling for them. They struck upon his senses, cold, metallic, hopelessly remote. Had the magic region closed entirely with the going of his dream? . . .

And was this the way all women looked at marriage—the whole world of women? Heartlessly, with cold-blooded calculation; as if, indeed, men were not creatures of mind and soul to be mated with as comrades, but machines to serve their ends?

Then what did it mean—their talk about the sacredness of marriage, the beauty of the fire-side? What were all the traditions worth? If women—good women—could so misuse the highest, greatest of all relations— How could people look at it that way?

The real marriage, then, had not taken place at all. It was illusion only that for a time their two beings had merged in exquisite understanding.

Then what sort of emotion had she known? What was the nature of it? Had she been capable, a hundredth part, of the rapture that had

transfigured him? How was it possible that a woman could so pretend?

With the spine gone out of life, as it were, Frank asked himself how he could push himself to find something to do? He asked it during the weary days that followed.

He rose early every morning and went out to apply at afternoon newspaper offices or to answer advertisements. But he had no ambition, no incentive. When a man has joined veins with the negative forces, nothing he does succeeds. Struggle and work are vain. Always he is fighting the current; never does it work with him.

He saw at last what it meant to be flung out upon the world, only half equipped, his talents green in the bud. Again and again his father's maxims came back to him.

"If you'd only find something and stick to it!" Lucille complained, on a raw morning, when he got up earlier than usual to start again on his ceaseless quest. The radiator was cold, the room blue, the streets were ice and sleet outside.

"It wasn't my fault," he reminded her quickly, "that I gave up the first and best job of them all."

"That's right, Frank—blame the woman. That's the manly part—if it's manliness you insist on."

"That's beastly hateful of you, Lucille." He could not help it. Her scorn was growing to be a thing that struck poison from his spirit.

He found himself staring hard at her contemptuous face, that had once seemed so wonderfully attractive to him. She had a narrow, selfish mouth, a hard little chin, and cold blue eyes with not a spark of magnetism in them. Her whole personality was a coin that rang flat.

What strange trick of nature was it that had shown her to him at first as a creature radiantly lovely, infinitely desirable? Why had Fate bandaged his eyes just long enough to cheat him—what was her object with him?

After all, he had been caught by the sort of beauty that depends upon a trick of dress, a glance, a curl, a belt drawn snugly round the waist.

"If you can't speak like a gentleman, I'll go to mother's room."

"Go, if you like. It's just what I was wishing." Then, in quick revulsion, "Good God, Lucille, you're making a brute of me. And I swear I'm not naturally a brute. Don't go, please——"

But she had already vanished, with a backward look that more than punished him.

Plodding wearily from place to place, rebuffed, disheartened, he asked himself over and over how it had come about — any of it, all of it.

Around and around the question his mind revolved, always to come back to one point: His own act was responsible for it, every whit. It had all started from that one deed, the merging of his life interests with those of another.

It was love, then, that had done it. But why should love, the greatest force in the universe, bring chaos and loss of self-respect?

All the things his manliness had cried out against he had done—for her. It was bearing down upon him now that he no longer possessed himself. His thoughts, his views, his principles, were no longer his. He was not Frank Hathaway any more, but partly another person. He had been thinking that other's thoughts, seeing through that other person's eyes.

Dating with the hour he had thrown up that first good opportunity, he had joined a very current of shifting purposes, of uncertain prospects. He belonged to that pitiful army of strugglers, cursed at the start because unemployed. He was like any one in a thousand wretches wandering about the city, hoping against hope, ending their quest on the cold park benches, lining up for their charity bread.

He was growing now to dread with unutterable dread the daily return home. To-night, with the memory of the morning's wrangle still sharp in his soul, he felt that he could not, by any effort of his will, bring himself to face Lucille.

He sat for a long time in the tawdry parlor, wondering what he should do. Never before had he felt such loneliness. It was worse than the loneliness of single life, for then there had always been the Hope ahead.

Taking up a book, he tried to read. He was afraid to go upstairs, he dared not join the boys at poker, he had no heart to respond to overtures from the other boarders. So he sat on, drearily, turning the leaves of the book and seeing nothing.

And while he was sitting there, a girl entered; entered radiantly with the soft rush of happiness that always wafted from her—the girl he had noticed daily sitting in a far corner of the dining room, her face luminous with a peculiar beauty.

It did not seem strange that she should come over and sit beside him. It did not seem strange that they should begin to talk to each other. It was one of the rare, predestined happenings that one does not try to account for, but merely accepts with joy.

Her face kindled when he spoke of the city. "I love it," she said, in her breathless, shining way. "Every bit of it. All the thousand currents of action, the contact with shoals and shoals of human beings, the rush, the fight—*everything!*"

"You want the fight?"

"I do. I love the pressure and the spur. Even the failures are beautiful, for they make us grow."

He sat up and drew the first real breath he had drawn for months. It was what he wanted to believe, what he really did believe.

"If you've got anything in you, New York will whip it out of you. But you mustn't be afraid of the hurts. It's the hurts, you know, that make us dig and dig till we uncover what's in us."

"Sometimes," he said, "it's precious little. So much less than we thought."

"Oh, but that isn't so. It's always much *more* than we know anything about. Every man has whole continents in him that he's never explored at all. And it's the disappointments that force him to turn explorer."

Ah, this was what he had wanted—what he had needed! This appeal to his soul and brain. It was what the best in him cried for—the sort of stimulus a man must have if he would achieve his goal.

"But if there's a handicap—if we're tied? Sometimes, you know, there's some thing we've got to get rid of first."

"There! That's just the mistake we always make. We want to run away from the hard thing. Why, that's the very thing we most need to lash the best out of us. And we've got to stick. Nobody ever yet won out by deserting."

He grew to watch for her now at table, and the little nod she gave him helped to send him forth with greater courage. One morning they walked

together to the subway and had an inspiring chat all the way down to Wall Street. Another time, when he was returning in the late subway crush, he found her just ahead of him on the homeward walk.

It was a wonderful winter twilight. On upper Broadway, as far as the eye could reach, chain on chain of arc lights hung like balls of white and violet fire. Her cheeks bloomed softly, her eyes were brighter than any light.

The two entered the house together just as the dinner bell was ringing.

Frank, bounding up to his room, was conscious of one big fact that towered above all others. He had it—he had it! He hadn't lost it, after all—the zest for life!

Suddenly, at the head of the stairs, he paused, aware of some one. Then, glancing up, he saw bent upon him from Mrs. Harden's doorway, a look. It was the most potent, concentrated look he had even seen upon a human being's face. In it were blended triumph, malice and a poignant satisfaction.

At table, neither she nor Lucille would notice him. As he sat with them after dinner they maintained the same deadly calm. He took up a paper and strove to seem absorbed in it, but put it down and sighed.

Lucille was quick enough to notice now.  
"What are you sighing for, Frank?"

Mrs. Harden laughed. "It isn't difficult to guess, Lucille. I'm surprised that you should ask. No doubt Miss Penneman is waiting in the parlor for him now."

Then he remembered. He was no longer free. He was not free even to sun his soul, that had grown dingy for lack of radiance. They owned him—his every pulse and thought and feeling. Even his breathing was not his own.

"Mrs. Harden, I demand that you tell me exactly what you mean."

"You know perfectly well, Frank Hathaway, exactly what I mean. If you had your mind on business instead of every pretty girl you happen to meet——"

"That's enough!" he cried, leaping up. "I won't stand it! If a man can't be courteous to a woman boarder——"

"You're in a fine position to be saying what you will or won't stand. A man who can't support his wife——"

He turned upon her. "If I'm not doing my level best, no man ever did. I've exhausted everything!"

"Nonsense! If a man's got it in him he's bound to succeed at something. I'd sweep streets, I'd shovel snow, I'd do anything, if I were a man, before I'd let my board bill mount up as yours is doing."

Frank stared at her. What woman's inconsistency might he next expect?

"Do you really mean that?"

"Of course I mean it."

"Very well," he said, with finality. "I shall remember that you gave your permission."

## V.

But it was not to be sweeping streets or shoveling snow. With the renewed belief in himself that Miss Penneman had inspired, a plan came to him that night which, though it meant in a sense humiliation, nevertheless seemed a way out of the wilderness of non-achievement. The next day he sent a long letter to his chum, Bob Waring, who lived in one of the big shoe manufacturing towns in Massachusetts.

About a week later he presented himself to his wife and her mother with his head up and a self-possession that caused them to look at him curiously.

"You will be surprised to hear, doubtless, that I have found something to do, but it will mean our leaving New York in two or three days."

"What—where is it?" demanded the two women eagerly.

"I've got a job in a shoe factory out home—not home, but near it. It's a very good start."

"A shoe factory! You mean an office position?"

"No, it's working on the shoes——"

"What! At the bench?"

"Sure, at the bench. Why not? It's more permanent than street-sweeping and, besides, they'll soon put me at the machine. Sprague McConnell will send one of his men over to teach me——"

Both women dropped like stones into their chairs.

"A factory worker! Why, Frank Hathaway, you don't mean to say you've come to that?"

He had put forth tons of energy in the getting of this job, humbling himself in ways he had sworn he would not descend to, even swallowing his pride when he knew it was his father's name that counted. More than all else, he had sacrificed his natural feelings in going back to live so near the father who would not forgive, the home that extended to him no welcome.

The rebuff was to be expected, but it was like a dash of cold water.

"You don't understand," he said. "In Massachusetts they don't look at it like that. Any number of college men from Harvard and Yale are learning the business in just that way. That's just what the factories want now—college-trained men. Just look at Neal Thompson—he's a Harvard man. Started at Warren's two years ago, and where is he now? Assistant Superin-

tendent. It's a mighty good chance and I'm lucky to get it."

"Lucky," sneered Lucille, "to get *that*. Well, I did think you had more ambition. It wouldn't be so bad if we weren't going there where everybody will know. You'll be a regular day laborer, just like any common man. Just think, mother! What will the Pauls say and the Atkinsons? All the girls will be laughing up their sleeves to think I've had such a comedown."

"They always were jealous of your popularity, Lucille. Won't they be jubilant, though, to see how it's all flattened out!"

Frank understood. It simply meant, then, that a new edge was to be given to the contempt they felt for him already. He sat appalled, bewildered. Anger conquered.

"Maybe you don't think I've had the fight of my life getting this place you think so contemptible. You don't seem to realize that it's like moving a mountain to get any sort of work these days, when the unions control everything. It's easy enough to tell a man to 'take anything he can get'—this 'laborer's work,' as you call it, is just the work that's so hard to clinch. As for the factories, a green man hasn't the ghost of a show. The only chance a man has is to go to the country towns where the smaller factories are willing to apprentice new hands, or else through

pulling wires, fix it with a big factory to get the chance to be taught in spite of the unions."

"Now Frank Hathaway, if you try to tell me that you had a struggle to get this little bit of factory job, with all the influence your father's got, I simply won't believe you."

He sat still for a hopeless moment, then got up wearily and walked to the door. His step had been elastic, jubilant, when he entered. As he went out of the house he had the slouching gait of a man whose pluck and spirit had gone.

So grateful had Frank been at the prospect of employment that offered a future, and so pre-occupied with the details of securing it, that he had not time to consider the possible effects of his return to the community he had left so sensationly. He was not prepared for the sly amusement, the light contempt that greeted his latest venture at making a living.

He saw that one impression, and one only, had made its ineradicable tracks in the New England brain. He was "Kid Hathaway," who had run away from college to be married, and whose family had not forgiven. Sympathy was with the family, not with him.

He had pictured himself entering upon his new work flushed with enthusiasm, ambitious. Instead, he went in doggedly, on the defensive for jibes and jests.

After all, work on a shoe bench is not inspir-

ing. He was awkward and "green," and the long days in which he seemed to make no progress taxed his courage and determination to a degree he had not dreamed of. Moreover, the knowledge that his story was known in the town and to the other workers served to increase the sense of humiliation he felt in being reduced to such an occupation.

There was a time when this very condition, hostile though it was, would have had the effect of spurring him on. But now, strive as he might, he could not summon his old fiery spirit of determination. He felt the thoughts of others, like miasma, blighting his very purpose. A strange paralysis seized his faculties, so that he seemed no longer able to say, "I will!"

Every morning he threw himself upon his task with a sort of furious desperation. But the machine was like a devil that defied him. He urged, he struggled, he sweated, but to no avail. He couldn't get the "hang of it," his hands refused to respond to what he was urging them to do.

Was this to be a repetition of all the other experiences? Was it true indeed that he must balk at this, as he had balked at dozens of jobs before it?

He urged, he struggled, but to no avail. His powers refused to harness. Day after day his spirit battled blindly against the opposing forces,

mysterious, merciless, that had hurled him from his once high place of confidence and self-respect into this mire of wretchedness, tossing him from failure to failure, from terror to terror, giving him no rest.

And their work with him was not yet done! He couldn't compass it.

Protest in him grew and grew with every day.

But over against it, necessity stood and held the lash above him. Always, sleeping or waking, he heard the whine of a whip in his ears. It wasn't what he would, but what he must. And always he seemed to hear the comments of friends and acquaintances, and of the men and women in the shop.

"Oh, Kid Hathaway!" they were saying. "He got what was coming to him. He's no good. He threw up college for a girl and then he tried in New York and couldn't make good. Guess he thought the old man would help him out, but he'll find now that life isn't all cakes and ale."

"He's no good!" It was in the air. It was in everybody's glance and smile and tone. The very walls rang with it—he couldn't get away from it.

In the gang room, amid the roar of the machinery, he stood and grappled with the fiend that still defied him.

Could it be that they were right—that he could not keep a job, that he was after all "no good?"

Was it possible that he, Frank Hathaway, who, less than a year ago, was free, happy, intrepid, brimming with virile purpose, had become in one turn of Fate's wheel a creature of shifting purpose, lacking respect and ambition?

Suddenly, in a peculiar flash of vision, he seemed to see himself as he existed in the minds of others. He got the picture as it looked to them; a youth hot-headed, reckless, basely ungrateful to his father; a "kid" lacking courage or stability, who would "never amount to anything."

A roar greater than the roar of the machinery started in him. It came from subterranean depths in him, depths that his conscious thought had not suspected. It was a rage, big, compelling, that would not be gainsaid.

Was this, then, to be the end—the end of all his passionate dreams? Was he to drift along, month after month, year after year, a no-account, scorned, laughed at by those who might have honored him? *Was his father's great ideal for him to come to nothing?*

No!

The resolve leaped in him with the force of an explosion that shook him, and then lifted him like strong arms above all uncertainties, all doubt and self-contempt. And in that hour the machine came quietly under his power.

Then one day when no other thought possessed

him, save thankfulness and hearty pleasure in the work at hand, a letter came. He read it first with a dazed sense of unreality. The name of the firm, the importance of the offer—all of it was just such a triumph as he used to picture in those earlier days of enthusiasm, when faith and ardor dared to imagine anything.

After all, then, he need not be a machine. His protest had been prophecy. Fate held a different order of success in store for him. Now that he had shown himself willing, the necessity was taken from him.

Hard as it was to hold his triumph, he decided not to tell Lucille or her mother yet. First he must go to New York and arrange in person the details.

He was congratulating himself that he would be able to get off without their suspecting, when Lucille came into the room.

"Why, Frank, you're all dressed up—and you're going away. You didn't tell us—"

"I can't tell you just yet, Lucille. I'm taking a little trip—you'll see me back in a day or two."

"Where are you going?"

"Do you really insist on knowing, dear? I'd rather not tell, just yet, if you don't mind."

"You're going to New York."

"That's pretty good for a first shot. How did you guess? But see here, Lucille. Don't say anything about it, dear. I ask you for a particular

reason. It sounds mysterious, I know. But just trust me and keep the secret, won't you?"

He did not get in until late the next night, for his plans had been delayed. As he went up the street, buoyant, eager, scarcely able to contain his joy, he planned how he would tell them; quietly, with dignity, as befitted a man who had come to his own. He thrilled as he pictured their astonishment, their disbelief at first, then their full recognition—

Lucille and Mrs. Harden, regardless of the hour, were sewing by the dining room lamp. He entered calmly, but his suppressed excitement was more intense than the most violent expression.

They regarded him, without speaking at once, observing his transfigured face; his poise, erect as never before; his manner, curiously hushed with the effort at control.

Mrs. Harden broke the tension. "Well! We thought you were never coming. Perhaps, now that it's all over, you'll condescend to explain why you stole away so secretly to New York."

It nettled him that she should take this tone before giving him a chance. And it hurt him that Lucille had told.

"I'm anxious enough to tell you, Mrs. Harden, if you'll give me an opportunity. That's what I hurried home for—that's why I'm here—"

"*Hurried* home. If you call that hurrying!" laughed Lucille.

"I couldn't come any faster," he declared. He sat down, out of breath, suddenly at a loss. A memory was bearing down upon him of previous scenes.

"Well, tell us. We're waiting. There ought to be a lot to tell about a trip that takes a man two days. What great business scheme is hatching *now?*"

He caught the sneer in her tone and a curious obstinacy held him silent.

"Why, you don't mean to say it *wasn't* business?"

"Of course it was business. What else but business could occupy me, Mrs. Harden?"

"What else? *Ask Esther Penneman.*"

It was as if a bomb had exploded in his brain. A curious stillness came after.

Frank stood up. He was conscious of giddiness, that made him take a step toward the mantel, where he stood leaning to steady himself. Big, furious words struggled in him; words that tore him inside, but burst and sputtered at his lips.

A cry came from him finally, the old, commonplace, human cry—"As God is my witness."

Then Mrs. Harden's laugh, discordant, horribly merry—"Quite a joke, wasn't it—carrying it all off so jauntily right in our very faces?

Taking the money that ought to have gone to Lucille to spend on another woman. I knew you were a no-account, Frank, but I didn't think you'd do it quite so daringly as that."

A queer thing happened as he stared at her. Every object within range seemed to drop away from his vision, except her face. It was no longer a woman's face. It was that of a demon.

"You mean to say, then, that you don't believe me?" He heard himself asking it in a voice that was perfectly calm.

Mrs. Harden stood up and faced him. "I mean to say, Frank Hathaway, you *lie!*"

Something swooped upon him, quicker than lightning. But it had the color of red. A thing lay on the mantel, under his hand. It was heavy, like iron, and smooth. His fingers closed over it, gripped it—

Lucille's voice, worlds distant, brought him back with a shock. "Frank, Frank! What are you going to do?"

His mind, caught under an ink-black cloud, shot out suddenly into the light. He was back again in the actual, fully conscious of the danger that had grazed him.

Not more than a second had passed. The thing was there, safe, under his hand.

"What did you think," he asked, "I was going to do?"

His words were quiet, as he was quiet. He

took up his hat and passed on into his room. But the moment he was within, revulsion came. He fell to trembling so that his legs would not bear him up.

He was lying stretched across his bed, helpless as a child, when the clock struck one. He listened. They had gone to their room. The scene was coming back to him, all of it, part by part, word by word. One face stood out that was the face of a demon.

Something was rising in him, filling his veins with strength. It was rebellion. Why should he keep up this farce of marriage, this wretched contract, that had brought him nothing but unhappiness from the first? It had shackled his manhood. It had dogged, weakened, tortured him. To-night, it might have made of him——

He shuddered when he thought of that and sat up, breathing hard. The sweat trickled from his forehead. Had he not, then, had warning enough?

His mind was made up. He would go away now and not return. The news of his good fortune he could never tell them. They did not deserve to know.

Physical strength came fully back with this resolve. He arose softly and packed his suit case with the lamp turned low. Out in the street, his shoulders lifted, he breathed the breath of a

free man. Alone, unhampered, he could at last amount to something!

There would not be a train for two hours, they told him at the station. He paced up and down outside, feeling the damp, sweet wind of early spring in his face. Then tiring of his walk, he went inside, where he sat reading a newspaper that some one had left on the bench.

Two of the stories were of wife desertion. He scanned them carelessly, as was his habit with the news. Then he read them again. The husbands were shiftless, drinking men. Their wives appeared in the police court and poured out tales of poverty, of struggle for support.

Drinking, shiftless men! Cowards! Most wife deserters were that. Most wife deserters—

He got up and went outside again. The wind was no longer sweet with spring. There was a nipping, ugly chill in it. He paced back and forth, restlessly, unhappily, tossed again into chaos.

“No man ever yet won out by deserting. We’ve got to stick.”

The words pealed through his memory, bugle clear.

*She* had said it. He saw again the flash of her kindling face, he felt again the rush of happiness that always wafted from her.

The train came, but he did not take it. Instead, he turned and went back the way he had

come. In the east the sky showed violet-white with dawn.

"We want to run away from the Hard thing. Why, that's the very thing we most need to lash the best out of us!" She had said that, too.

He had needed it, then. The very bitterest and worst of it. Through all of it a purpose had been working.

The forces he had fought and hated were friendly forces, pushing him on and up in spite of himself; pushing him nearer and nearer this hour of *seeing*, of understanding.

A new man was springing to life in him, new worlds were opening. Big resolves surged up from the greater depths in him—the permanent depths that lay beneath the savagery, the weakness, the human passions that had governed him till now.

In spite of his shackles, he would succeed. The mind and the soul of him could not be tied. Out of the very wreck of his romance he would weave the fabric of his own development. Other men had done it. He knew that. Thousands of them, disillusioned as he was, had dropped the thought of personal happiness and gone on building up an individual life. Civilization itself was made up of just such conquests. Thousands of permanent homes were founded on just this wreck of the personal hope.

Perhaps—who knew? Even the thing that galled him so—that he had been tricked into marriage—might have its part in the scheme of his development. Nature, perhaps, in her mysterious way had worked through the arts and plans of a woman, to make a man of him.

And then, too—here his heart bounded strangely—was it not possible that Lucille herself might change, might grow, even as he had grown? His character had by no means been perfect; might it not be that some day the girl he had first loved in her would come back to him?

If he would hold to his resolve; if he would be patient with her and very tender—

The east had turned red when he swung into the pathway and up the steps of his home. There were but two or more days of factory work. He would perform them faithfully.

He got his own breakfast, donned his overalls, and joined the army that now poured through the streets.

As he entered the gang room, he saw a man standing by his machine, a man whose figure was strangely familiar. His back was toward him, but as Frank came up he turned.

The two stood facing each other without a word—father and son. Franklin Hathaway's grim, unyielding countenance, schooled for a lifetime in repression, showed not a quiver.

But his hands reached and took the boy's hands and gripped them. And Frank knew—knew as well as if he had flung his arms about him.

Life—beautiful, triumphant, thrilling with incentive—trumpeted to him again.

4.5







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